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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

IN SEARCH OF VISIBILITY

THE ETHICAL TENSIONS IN THE PRODUCTION OF HUMANITARIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

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Department: Faculty of Education and Language Studies
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Date: September 2012

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Abstract

For humanitarian organisations that use photography as their major medium of communication the visual portrayal of suffering remains an issue surrounded with controversy and sensitivity. Despite the adoption of regulatory codes and protective protocols by non-governmental organisations, the criticism which has circulated during the past three decades still remains, directed at NGOs, media and photographers by academics and audiences, over the production of formulaic and stereotypical imagery with accusations of subjugating populations of the global South. The main tension in this form of imaging is how vulnerable populations can be portrayed in ways that do not infringe on dignity, yet meet the need for effective NGO visibility and fundraising communications in the image-saturated media landscape. Little primary data exists on how ethical behaviour in this type of imaging is understood by its producers and how principles of ethics guide the processes and practices in the field.

This thesis explores a way to redress this gap in understanding by exploring the photographic representation of humanitarian subjects from the perspective of their production. The research draws on four humanitarian photographic assignments in Bangladesh supported by interviews with the social actors involved in the production of NGO visual communications. The ethnographic accounts of the experiences of the author as researcher and photographer point to complex production processes and practices that are imbued with continual ethical considerations framing the interactions of image-making. The findings emphasise the capacity of the so-called victims to negotiate and represent themselves and draws into question the regulatory claims of ensuring the protection and rights of photographic subjects. The findings reveal highly complex, if not haphazard, processes that evolve through situations in the field and the context of assignments, which complicates interpretation and realisation of this type of regulation as operational strategy.

Keywords: NGO, photography, production, representation, childhood, ethics

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List of Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BD	Bangladesh
CARMA	Global Media Analysts
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
DSLR	Digital single-lens reflex
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PVO	Private Voluntary Organisation
RSF	Reporters sans Frontières
RCA	Royal College of Art
SCF	Save the Children Fund
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UK	United Kingdom
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
WFP	World Food Programme

List of Key Informants

NGO Communications Staff

Chief of Communications, UNICEF Bangladesh.

Chief of Communications, UNICEF Thailand.

Communications Manager, UNICEF, South East Asia and the Pacific.

Communications Manager, UNDP, Bangladesh.

Senior Communications Consultant, UNDP Bangladesh.

Regional Communications Director for the Asia Pacific, World Vision.

Communications Manager, World Vision Thailand.

Regional Information Officer for Asia and the Pacific, ECHO.

Regional Communications Manager, Save the Children, South East Asia and the Pacific.

Head of External Relations, World Food Programme, Bangladesh.

Senior Advisor to OCHA, Asia and the Pacific.

Salma Siddique, Image Editor, UNICEF Bangladesh.

Ruhi, Project Coordinator for 'Reading Room', Bangladesh.

Zaki, Country Director for 'Reading Room', Bangladesh.

Touhit, Project Coordinator for the local implementing charity for 'CAS', Bangladesh.

Photographers

'Ahmed' is a senior freelance photographer in Case Studies Two and Four, Bangladeshi.

'Akil', Senior AFP photojournalist and teacher of photography, Bangladeshi.

'Bitan', NGO photographer, Bangladeshi.

'Chandran', photographer and social documentarian, Bangladeshi.

'Diego', freelance photojournalist covering news stories in the Asia region, Mexican.

'Eknath', NGO photographer and videographer, Bangladeshi.

'Faisal', NGO photographer, Bangladeshi.

'Greer', Magnum photographer, American.

'Hugo', freelance photojournalist, French.

Morten Krogvold, photographer and tutor, Norwegian.

Saikat Mojumder, Drik photographer in Case Study One with Reading Room, Bangladeshi.

Shهاب Uddin, social documentarian, Bangladeshi.

Suvendu Chatterjee, photographer and Director of Drik India, Indian.

We do not sufficiently distinguish, in our observations upon language, between a clear expression and a strong expression ... The former regards the understanding; the latter belongs to the passions. The one describes a thing as it is; the other describes it as it is felt.

Edmund Burke, 1757
A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 *Setting the Scene: En Route to Shoot*¹

In a Lexus on the road between Dhaka and Brahmanparia with the Country Director and the commissioned photographer, 31 March 2010.

Following my line of questioning he leans over to Saikat who was in the front seat and says: "I want an iconic photo". Saikat nods his head and does not respond and I cannot tell if this was uncomfortable silence or annoyance at an unreasonable request.

When we get out of the car for a pit stop I ask Zaki privately, what he meant by that [iconic photo]. He replies that photo shoots produce the same type of photos and he wants something different. I probe further and ask what could be different and how. He thinks for a brief moment: "I don't know, I don't know exactly what it is. But when I see it I will know" and lights his cigarette.

This research traces the pursuit of these elusive iconic photographs - those which are surrounded with sensitivity yet remain a powerful medium in humanitarian communications. It approaches the study of humanitarian photography² through the relationship between images and their development. It traces the production of these desired images from the initial level of commission by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and International Organisations (IOs) who depend on them for their communications and visibility work, to the actual work of the photographers who are assigned to produce the images. It also includes a personal account of a photographic assignment I was commissioned to undertake by an NGO and my reflexive observations from the position of both researcher and photographer. By focussing on production and its inherent tensions, this thesis investigates key issues that arise in studying this form of imaging; issues such as the preferred

¹ This opening vignette is from field notes of a conversation between the charity commissioner, the professional photographer and I en route to the location of the photographic assignment.

² I use the term humanitarian photography to describe photography which adopts characteristics from documentary traditions and which has, as its main purpose, the promotion of human welfare. This definition mainly includes issues of development and rehabilitation which are distinct from the disaster relief context, although they all can be identified as part of the humanitarian aid agenda. This label, however contentious, will be discussed further in section 1.2.3.

representations of the global South³, the complexity of construction and performance, and the regulatory practices around photographing those perceived to be vulnerable. This approach provides a timely perspective on contemporary demands to produce ethical photography and suggests ways to widen the scope of the paradigm within which images are constructed and the ethical considerations behind this type of imaging.

1.2 Locating Research Contexts

Humanitarian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations)⁴ are increasing in size, scope and participation. Their mandates are expanding and now include projects once considered to be functions of states or major international non-governmental organisations, including education, the protection of human rights, economic development, democracy promotion and peace building (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004; Abélès, 2008; Barnett and Weiss, 2008). With the expansion of organisational mandates has come a widening of the social issues addressed and the adoption of new forms of communications - the role of NGOs in global politics and the visual economy of humanitarianism is increasingly significant⁵.

Expansion in organisational remit necessitates professionalised communications strategies and methods to compete in the international humanitarian marketplace, which is characterised by competition for funds from various sources. Communications are designed for multiple purposes, including awareness raising, fundraising and increasing support for particular organisations in this new commercialised environment resulting in the merging of public discourses of development with the public discourses of charity into discourses of fundraising and education (Smillie 1995, p.

³ I use the term *global South* to refer to the countries who receive aid and the phrase *the West* to refer to those who fund and donate humanitarian assistance. These distinctions are general and adopted for clarity.

⁴ For simplicity I use the broad term of humanitarian organisations and NGOs interchangeably throughout this thesis to include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), big international nongovernmental organisations (BINGOs) and government-funded national international development organisations (i.e. DFID, USAid, AusAid, DANIDA, SIDA) which are working to provide humanitarian services. The umbrella term of humanitarian services refers to the three main sectors of humanitarian organisations activity: immediate relief and humanitarian emergency aid, development aid which addresses long term development programmes, and advocacy and education to raise awareness of development issues both in the countries the programmes are executed and the donor audiences. Humanitarian organisations operate within and across these fields with varying degrees of specialisation and focus.

⁵ The political effects of imagery were exemplified in the diplomatic incident between Britain and India in which, in a leaked memo, the Indian foreign minister, Nirupama Rao, proposed 'not to avail [of] any further DFID [British] assistance with effect from 1st April 2011,' because of the 'negative publicity of Indian poverty promoted by DFID' (*The Telegraph*, 4 February 2012) The controversy did not centre solely around such representations, but suggested deeper anxieties and concerns over questions of aid giving, national interests and commercial gain, of which the imaging of poverty played an important part.

135; Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 661). The public faces of development, i.e. the ways that the work of development agencies is communicated, play a pivotal position 'in mediating connections between the 'southern poor', development organisations, and northern individuals' (Smith and Yanacopulos 2004, p. 657) in both the long-term and short-term solutions (Benthall, 1993). Aid organisations, which commission these projects, have been described as the 'new institutions of representation' (Shaw, 1996) affecting policies, practices and discourses of development (Dogra 2007, p.161).

Over the last two decades the public profiles of NGOs have increased and, at the same time, there have been heated debates concerning humanitarian imagery, assessed by some as demeaning and patronising and consequently unethical (Van der Gaag and Nash, 1987; Benthall, 1993; Lidchi, 1993). The fact that representations which have been judged as unethical are used in the name of humanitarianism and social development has also provoked discussion among NGOs themselves, as well as among academics (this is discussed in further detail in the literature review in the following chapter). As Höijer argues, 'images of distant suffering have become a part of ordinary citizens' perceptions of conflicts and crises in the world' (Höijer 2004, p. 514). The CARMA⁶ report (2006) on media coverage concluded that imagery and reporting of humanitarian work remain imbalanced and selective and that, in terms of humanitarian crises, Western self-interest is the most important pre-condition for significant media coverage. This supported similar findings by Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) whose report, *The Live Aid Legacy* (2002), revealed a continued lack of understanding of development issues by British audiences who still associated the global South with the role of grateful and passive receiver.

The medium of photography occupies an important yet ambiguous role in the humanitarian field. Media discourse emphasises its potential to function as a way of bearing witness to human suffering and of offering a way to promote social change (Tait, 2011). At the same time photography is highly politicised and some view it as a manifestation of visual imperialism (see Mirzoeff, 1998). These conflicting discourses inform and construct transnational cultural interactions, of which humanitarian communications play a part. This thesis is positioned therefore at the crossroads of activity in the humanitarian non-governmental sector, the international

⁶ CARMA International is an independent global media analysis organisation.

community of image producers, and the geographic location of Bangladesh where the case studies for this research were carried out. The NGO communications management and the photographers operating in the documentary and humanitarian field are implicated in these tensions and sensitivities, whether they intentionally support, deny or challenge them. This research asks, considering the history, the political and ideological critique, and the potential for positive and negative public responses, how such images are produced, legitimised for use and how do photographers and commissioners work with the dilemmas their roles entail in the politics of representation in the volatile humanitarian image economy?

1.2.1 The Image Industry

The image-business is inextricably linked to the development-business (Alam, 1994) and images of the global South and populations in crises occupy both the media and the cultural sectors through the medium of photography. During my research with the Bangladeshi photographic community, the types of photography projects I witnessed which were produced for the humanitarian organisations supported Alam's claims that: 'from slide shows in remote villages to slick exhibitions in posh hotels, from A5 flyers to coffee table books, from fundraising campaigns to annual reports, image hungry developmental agencies depend heavily on image makers' (Alam, 1994). Communications modes and formats utilising photography have furthermore moved beyond traditional direct appeal brochures and print ads in publications and have expanded into a multi-faceted 'public faces of development' (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004). In addition to the list by Alam, new methods of distribution in social media, broadcasting and cultural organisations have come to the fore and are now called by the industry term, *visibility projects*.

Photographic reportages, exhibitions and printed works which had previously been self-financed are now being produced with grant aid and sponsored by NGOs. In a difficult and volatile economic climate photographers and film makers are turning to charities, foundations, companies with corporate social responsibility (CSR) agendas for sponsorship and even governments to produce their issue-driven work. With organisational agendas driving these projects the editorial independence of the photographer is called into question and the degree of freedom of observation available to photographers on such assignments, given their sponsors' agendas, is arguably lessened (Harrington et al., 2010; Julliard, 2010).

In addition to these pressures, in 2011 Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), a France-based international non-governmental organisation which advocates freedom of the press and freedom of information opened an exhibition in Paris by announcing that the photojournalistic profession was under threat and that there was a major crisis in the media industry (Julliard 2011, p.9). One of the indications of this was the experiences of some of the leading names in photography during the Haiti crisis in 2010, when their work could not be sold. The main reason cited was the decline in media budgets from newspapers and news magazines and the impact these cutbacks had on photography. However, the arrival of the 'citizen journalist'⁷ was also cited as a factor. As technology has spread there are now more people claiming to be photographers than ever before, providing cheaper or sometimes free content, thereby competing directly with the professional photographers.

Photojournalism and documentary photography⁸ is said therefore to be in crisis and in this climate, ethical standards are under threat. Stuart Freedman, a photographer and commentator on photojournalism, argues that 'the industry relies increasingly on (young) freelancers brought up in a PR-soaked, compromised environment armed with digital cameras to cover the world. Cheaply.' (Freedman, 2010). He argues this has led to an increasing lack of ethical understanding and cultural referencing. Whether this statement represents an actual state of affairs, or is motivated by the perceived threat of a more democratised environment which threatens the traditional status of the profession, is not clear. Nevertheless he raises important questions about the role of ethics in production.

1.2.2 Images of Bangladesh

Portrayals of suffering, struggle and victory characterise photographs of Bangladesh from the earliest days of the country's independence, with the extensive documentation of the Bangladeshi

⁷ Citizen journalism, also referred to as participatory or public journalism, refers to the role public citizens are playing in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating information through new media technologies such as social networking and media sharing websites. The ubiquity of camera technology and the Internet allows citizens to access and distribute information which was previously in the reach of only larger news and media agencies. It is therefore seen by some as a way of both democratising and deprofessionalising the journalistic profession. Critics argue that the practice is unregulated, too subjective and lacks consistent quality.

⁸ The photojournalist and documentarian roles overlap and most photographers engage in both. Rosler (2000) attempts to differentiate the characteristics of each, as ideal types, arguing that documentary photographers attempt to build relations with the group they are documenting and that their assignments may be self-chosen projects, giving them the freedom to select their subjects and influence how the story they wish to tell is presented and distributed. In contrast, in photojournalistic assignments, the content and subjects are largely predetermined and priority lies with the assignment rather than building a relationship with the subjects. Both however are guided by principles of accuracy.

War of Liberation in 1971⁹ and the widely reproduced imagery of the atrocities committed by Pakistani forces¹⁰. The early 1970s was a period when Bangladesh rose prominently in the Western imagination, in part because of a charity concert held in New York as the first major concert for a social cause and hosted names such as George Harrison, Bob Dylan and Ravi Shankar. It was a concept which evolved into the high profile charity concerts of Band Aid and Live Aid in later years. These concurrent events raised interest in the newly independent country and images of Bangladesh's famine, refugees and cyclone, featured on the front of numerous publications in the West¹¹. The persistent stereotypical image of Bangladesh was established as an impoverished, disaster prone country with passive victims requiring Western assistance (Alam, 1994) and entered into popular imagination as a 'famine-stricken basket case' (Zohir 2004, p.4109). The campaigning for victims of Cyclone Bhola of 1970 and the subsequent focus on humanitarian subject matter developed alongside the arrival of the international development organisations while the persistence of these negative images in print and media has located the country as a test laboratory for development projects. As a UNDP report on Global Poverty explains, the country has become 'a role model of possible extremities and odds of human existence, and an example of hopeless future, a case of constant fear of some hidden disaster in the making and a permanent cause of liberal conscience and global welfarism' (UNDP, 2000).

While such images have had important implications for how Bangladesh is perceived in the West, there is also an indigenous history of disaster images which has relied on notions of realism. Zainul Abedin, one of the cultural fathers of Bangladesh, made a series of sketches of the Great Bengal Famine of 1943 and depicted scenes of death and starvation in the streets of Kolkata. This work is significant in that it served as social commentary on the colonial rule and simultaneously worked as a method to raise awareness and promote charity. In addition, Azim (2010) has argued that representations of poverty by the two giants of Bengali literary culture, Tagore and Nasrul, remain an important part of the collective cultural consciousness of the population even though such portrayals were written by people who had never lived in poverty. These representations relied on

⁹ This was documented by local and foreign photographers, such as Golam Kasem Daddy and David Burnett.

¹⁰ Kishor Parekh, an Indian photojournalist provided the first documentation of these atrocities in his book *Bangladesh: A Brutal Birth* (1972)

¹¹ *Time* magazine of 2 August 1971 featured a father and malnourished child on the cover with the title 'Pakistan's Agony' and the cover of *Newsweek* in the same week had a lone child with the title 'Bengal: The Murder of A People'.

notions of realism that attempted to translate the 'voices of the poor' into policy actions. Since independence, many in Bangladesh have used the country's poverty as a resource for attracting overseas investment and governments and local NGOs have created and supported an ideology of development dependency (Sen, 2010; Azim, 2010).

One of the contemporary organisations challenging these persistent unbalanced representations, in and outside Bangladesh, is the Drik organisation, founded in 1989 and set up to challenge the one-sided representations of the global South¹². It has become an outspoken source of social criticism and activism through its emphasis on social issues such as extra-judicial killings, human rights violations and corrupt officialdom. The Drik organisation, which was instrumental in the guidance of this research, has been attempting to challenge the cultural hegemony on two levels. Firstly they have challenged the media hegemony of the West and its tendency to depict the global South either through the lens of exoticism or victimhood. In order to combat this, they have supported the expansion and transformation of the media infrastructure and the revision of its visual content within countries such as Bangladesh (Hoek 2005, p.334). Based in Dhaka and with an office in Kolkata, Drik's initiatives on this score are numerous and include setting up *Pathshala, the South Asian Institute of Photography*, a festival of photography in Asia called Chobi Mela, a collaboration with the World Press Photo organisation and many collaborative partnering projects with NGOs in Bangladesh including participatory photography programmes for children and youth.

The second strategy adopted by Drik is stated emphatically in its mission statement which affirms the organisation was founded with the vision 'of a more egalitarian world, where materially poor nations have a say in how they are represented [and this] remains our driving force' (Alam, 2007). Central to this mission is photography and how local producers can participate in the representations of their own stories¹³ and how they can rectify the omissions and distortions in the histories of photographic representation of the global South¹⁴. These 'Other' histories and their

¹² Shahidul Alam, the founder of Drik, often used the term majority world to refer to countries of the global South. However for the sake of clarity, this thesis does not adopt this terminology and uses it only to refer to Majority World photo agency.

¹³ This remains controversial however and Hoek argues that the conventions of traditional documentary and photojournalistic genre, with which Drik aligns its efforts, remain unquestioned and their hegemonic assumptions intact (Hoek 2005, p. 336).

¹⁴ One such project to produce alternative analysis into the history of photography is the book *Kamra* (Oitijya Press, 2012) edited by Munem Wasif and Tansim Wahab. It documents and comments on the evolution of photography in the Bangladeshi context and provides an often overlooked history of photography and its functions in contemporary society.

contemporary forms have since become an area of interest on exhibition circuits in the West¹⁵. Bangladeshi photographers have started to succeed in the international image market, most notably Abir Abdullah, who was invited to be on the judging panel of World Press Photo (2011). Other Bangladeshi photographers have also been taken on by international photo agencies¹⁶, proving that an opening of opportunities for photographers from the global South exists and that their skills and visions are increasingly being recognised.

1.2.3 The Identities of Photographers in Bangladesh

The focus of this thesis is located in the photographic community of Bangladesh and photography in this context plays an important part in the development of the national identity of the country and its citizens. Photography is closely aligned with wider political agendas around national identity formation and many of the photographers choose to focus on subject matter from Bangladeshi society which they see as having particular social and political importance. The more renowned and politically-active photographers have used the medium to express controversial opinions challenging political powers within the country¹⁷ attracting international attention which has brought a keen interest to the work of Bangladeshi photographers beyond local audiences. One of the prominent platforms to showcase the skill and movement of photography, in political and aesthetic forms, has been work of Drik and the Chobi Mela, placing Bangladesh centrally on the international photography and visual documentary scene¹⁸.

The research focuses on humanitarian imagery and the most relevant sector of the industry to this study is the social documentary genre of photography. However, many other photographic specialisations exist, such as studio, commercial, fashion and portrait photography. Often the distinctions between these specialisations are not entirely clear, particularly in the converging digital world and as a result of competition in the image industry, where professionals who wish to

¹⁵ To name a few examples, the Whitechapel Gallery in London exhibited *Where Three Dreams Cross: 150 Years of Photography from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*, 21 January–11 April, 2010; the Victoria & Albert Museum exhibited *Figures and Fictions: Contemporary South African Photography* in June 2011 and the Guardian Gallery exhibited *Insider Outsider?* in July 2012.

¹⁶ Munef Wasif (Agence VU), GMB Akash (Panos), Andrew Biraj (Reuters), Abir Abdullah (European Press Agency) and many others freelancing for international press agencies.

¹⁷ Shahidul Alam's Crossfire exhibition in March 2010 with aims to intentionally provoke reactions on extrajudicial killing in Bangladesh succeeded: the exhibition was closed by authorities and promoted international interest in the events. See: <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/23/behind-39/> retrieved 31 January 2013.

¹⁸ <http://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/01/04/from-bangladesh-a-photo-festival-builds-bridges/> retrieved 31 January 2013.

secure a living must adapt and expand their repertoires and actively promote their work through various avenues. Securing assignments in an increasingly competitive field is assisted by becoming employed with a media company as a staff photographer, becoming a member of a photographic agency, and self-promoting through virtual platforms and photographer networks. Gaining a reputation and a firm standing in the industry is also helped by securing assignments with elite publications and with elite agencies and through winning photographic prizes and scholarships. These credentials can assist in gaining access to political decision-makers as well as valuable publicity in the photography community. The photographers in this study usually received commissions from the photographic agencies they worked for or through personal contacts within humanitarian organisations.

For Bangladeshi photographers positioning their work within both local and international contexts, labeling their perspectives as socially and politically relevant and important is an intrinsic part of the promotion and securing of assignments. The boundaries which construct these identities are diverse and shift in line with the considerations of the varying interests and demands of stakeholders and the market. The range of work of the photographers who contributed to this research is vast because, as full-time professionals, they move between genres of photojournalism, social documentary, commercial work and personal projects, depending on the assignment, the topic of filming, and their personal circumstances. Labels which classify their work and philosophical interests are adopted to promote their work, whether it is for exhibition circuits or for commercial contracts. One of the contentious labels most relevant to this study is that of the 'humanitarian photographer', even though few within the photographic community identified with this label and only begrudgingly admitted to using it as a marketing strategy to compete for the limited and lucrative assignments of humanitarian organisations. The label was sometimes seen as having derogatory associations, indicating a lack of skill, or was attached to those assignments which followed strict client protocol and were characterized by a lack of independence and 'vision', these being understood as essential skills for the social documentarian. The labels photographers attach to their work are fluid, and the characteristics of the professional photographer compared to the amateur or citizen journalist comprise characteristics such as technical mastery, independence and originality, which are guided by the ability to document

objectively and with consistent quality. The photographers who participated in this study aimed to produce socially responsible photography which took account of the formal elements of the photographic trade while simultaneously capturing the intimate stories of their photographic subjects. The label of documentary photographer captures these notions and is the most common self-ascribed label.

1.3 Organisation of Thesis

This thesis explores the emergence of the question of ethical photography as a crucial issue of concern among international humanitarian organisations, and as an issue of debate among the photographic communities.

In order to lay out and reveal the complexities of this issue the broad aims of the thesis can be summarised in three guiding research objectives:

- 1. Discursive constructs: How do image producers define and assess the ethical basis of imagery they produce and use? What are the conceptual criteria that govern the way ethics are understood and evaluated in the practice of humanitarian photography?**
- 2. Performance: How are the principles of ethical practice operationalised and performed in the field? What are the tensions at the level of practice and how are they negotiated?**
- 3. Agency: What do these tensions reveal about ethical regulation in photography, the agency and positions of the producers and the subjects they portray?**

This investigation is based on four illustrative case studies which are discussed in detail throughout the thesis. They are intended to illustrate the types of processes and practices which occur in image production for NGOs and not to provide diagnostic or prescriptive tools for ‘solutions’ to the problem, even if that were feasible¹⁹. Rather this thesis aims to lay out, from a new perspective, the processes of production and the wider theoretical and policy issues they raise which are relevant to diverse organisations utilising photography for social development and change projects.

¹⁹ The ethos of this dissertation adopts a similar position to Amartya Sen who, in a discussion panel called *Ensuring Health for All: How can it be Ensured?* at BRAC University in Dhaka on 13 February 2010 stated, “*Even if we figure out the problem, we don’t necessarily have a solution. But we are not able to find a solution without understanding the problem*”.

Chapter 1 locates the research context in the international image economy and describes the history of images of the research location of Bangladesh. It also outlines the guiding research objectives.

Chapter 2 examines the literature in the field of imaging as it relates to the concerns of production. The literature reviewed corresponds to the diverse nature of photography and photographic thought, traversing numerous disciplines to identify some 'guiding themes' and to suggest the limitations of existing frameworks. It seeks to delineate the oppositions: of authenticity and deception, solidarity and pity, dignity and exploitation, which underpin the tensions in the production of ethical photography.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology adopted in this research and explains the selection of Bangladesh as a research location, briefly describes the case studies, addresses positionality in the field, and outlines how ethical considerations were evaluated in the research practice.

Chapter 4 expands and offers more descriptive insight into the issue of regulations and ethical considerations through interviews with the development organisations who commission photography. The chapter also highlights the tensions between the ethical concepts and regulatory principles.

Chapter 5 and 6 present the four ethnographic case studies in the field which address the third aim of identifying tensions on the level of fieldwork and how photographers negotiate their access, interpret and execute the commissioner's demands. Chapter 5 presents three short assignments while Chapter 6 presents an in-depth documentary assignment.

Chapter 7 includes perspectives from photographers who work in the humanitarian sphere and their reflections on the industry, the existing tensions and how the conceptual criteria framing ethical practice are operationalised.

Chapter 8 concludes by discussing the dominant tensions identified at the site of production which include theoretical, regulatory and conceptual tensions and what these insights reveal for claims about ethical humanitarian photography. The chapter also includes personal insights and oversights on personal practice as a researcher and photographer.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Academic literature on NGO imagery is relatively limited, with the more significant and in-depth studies located in the post-Ethiopia famine discussions (Lidchi, 1993; Benthall, 1993). While recently there has been renewed interest in the subject, however most of the studies conducted are small-scale and focus on representations and image-effects, rather than on the process of production. In the few studies where production is addressed, research discussion is limited to the level of communications management (Cottle and Nolan, 2007; Dogra, 2012) without the inclusion of the production processes occurring in the field. These studies, together with the cultural criticism on imaging suffering, relate primarily to disaster and emergency imagery, despite contemporary NGO communications covering a much wider range of activity in functions of documentation and advocacy. The sensitivity surrounding this topic, with the strong reactions elicited by disaster imagery, has resulted in a polarised and narrow framing of photography in the positive/negative divide in the humanitarian context without considering deeper issues of practice (Dogra, 2012). This is an area this thesis aims to address.

This chapter discusses several inter-related bodies of literature that address the debates central to discussions on photography and the production of humanitarian imagery. This review draws upon a range of academic literature located in different disciplinary bases which inform discussions of photographic practice in the humanitarian context, in order 'to balance more general contextual and methodological concerns with more immediate investigation of the photographic' (Wells 2003, p.7). I make no attempt to review all the work that has been done on humanitarian and development aid and colonial photography. The bodies of literature for this review have been selected based on their relevance to issues highlighted by the research data and are those which have influenced my personal approaches to the subject during the journey as researcher and photographer.

My experiences in the field highlighted how the controversies and criticisms stemming from a few pivotal events in the history of aid projects informed many of the concerns of communications management and shape the processes and practice of image production. Section 2.2 presents a brief historical trajectory to give context to the research and to identify the types of ethical considerations which continue to surround the practice and guide contemporary understandings of ethicism in imagery.

As the empirical chapters took form, the theoretical writings and perspectives on the photograph seemed largely disconnected from practices in the field and some of the assumptions that various theories of representation made about the social actors in the process became untenable. The main contributions which inform the streams of thought which effectively have come to be known as ‘visual cultural studies’ are included (see Mirzoeff, 1998; Evans and Hall, 1999; Wells, 2003). The underlying assumptions that these theories make on the positions of the social actors²⁰ are highlighted and how they contribute to the foundations for the conceptual criteria at the core of ethical guidelines are examined in Section 2.3.

The initial research proposal focussed on the production of visual representations of non-Western childhoods in charity communications, although upon entering the field it expanded to include constructions of victimhood in general. From the perspective of producers, both NGO communications management and photographers, there was not a clear separation of children from other categories of ‘victim’, such as women, the elderly and the disabled. It was the notion of vulnerability that connected these groups of people although this notion is believed to be most effectively communicated through the image of the child. Section 2.4 covers a stream of writing on humanitarianism that is centred on representations of the child and the construction of victimhood.

2.2 Tracing Ethical Tensions: setting context to controversy

The confrontational advertising in the 19th century by Thomas John Barnardo is seen as one of the significant turning points in advocacy campaigns. In the 1870s Barnardo launched an extensive publicity and advertising campaign to raise funds for his newly founded homes for street children.

²⁰ For this research ‘social actors in production’ are referred to as the ‘producers’, which includes both the photographers and the NGO commissioners (see Hamilton 1997, pp.85-86), and ‘subjects’, which refer to the people in front of the lens, i.e. photographic subjects.

His campaign included some staged images in the format of 'before and after' photographs of rescued children which he used to document his role as their saviour. This was highly controversial however and brought him before a court of arbitration on charges of dishonesty and misconduct. The accusations made against him were on the grounds of deception, resulting from claims that he manipulated and staged these pictures for the purposes of public persuasion (Tagg 1993, p.85)²¹. The issue of staging and posing images challenged perceptions of the camera as being an objective recording tool and raised ethical dilemmas over the use of photographs as a way of manipulating the goodwill of audiences. Although the staging and posing of photographs was a technique used prior to this campaign²², the controversy was one of the first that highlighted the public demand for accountability and accuracy in campaigning imagery.

Up until the 20th century, children's aid was mostly confined to children within national boundaries unless tied to missionary activities or the Christian child-saving missions. Montgomery (2003) looks at another turning point which occurred during a period when this narrowness of focus was seen as more problematic and the idea that rescuing children had to transcend national boundaries became more prominent. In 1919 the first British overseas relief agency dedicated to helping children, called Save the Children Fund (SCF), was started to help the starving children of Austria and other defeated nations after World War I. Its founder claimed to act without regard for race, religion or politics and the child was seen as being outside the political. In 1922 a silent film was produced by SCF to highlight the plight of children caught up in the famine which followed the Russian civil war and this film used graphic images of starving, dying and dead children to arouse audience sympathies. The child became the symbol of global victimhood with childhood innocence representing the apolitical nature of suffering.

Until the 1960s most fundraising appeals showed negative and often extremely graphic images of sick and dying children and these went largely unquestioned by the public (Lidchi, 1993; Smillie, 1995). The 1960s had produced the 'Oxfam child' - an image of a malnourished African child used

²¹ Such methods were seen as unacceptable at the time but Barnardo saw the use of photography, no matter how staged, as a useful method of fundraising. It remains so for the organisation he founded and Barnardo's campaigns have repeatedly challenged public levels of tolerance through the manipulation of images, see for example discussions of recent campaigns by Nunn (2004) and Ash (2005).

²² Images of famine victims in Madras taken by Captain Hooper (1876-77) were also posed, with some people too weak to sit up being held up by rope. Staging has also been documented in much later periods, such as Oxfam images from Congo (1961) where children were posed for the camera (see Campbell et al., 2005).

in fundraising and ads after 1963 to raise money for the Hunger Million Appeal. Footage from Biafra and the famines in Africa in the 1970s also produced explicit images (Benthall 1993, p.179). Smillie, in writing about aid campaigns during this period, called such images 'the pornography of poverty' and criticised the 'the use of starving babies and other emotive imagery to coax, cajole and bludgeon donations from a guilt-ridden Northern public' (Smillie 1995, p.136). Such images were guided by rules of advertising, rather than by humanitarian ethics, and these directed organisations to concentrate on images which were simple, direct, emotive and challenging (Lidchi, 1993).

Much of this went largely unquestioned until the pivotal event of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-85 which alerted the wider public to issues of ethics in representations of humanitarian events. It has since been recognised as the first global media disaster and it began unfolding with images broadcast through the film produced by Michael Buerk and Mohamed Amin which was shown on BBC News on 23 October 1984. Later the event transformed into a global charity fundraising campaign with the Band Aid and Live Aid phenomena set up and promoted by Bob Geldof²³.

The Ethiopian Famine was the first global, mediatised event and the imagery circulated at this time raised the profile of photographs as powerful 'inventors' and 'mediators' of events. The significance of the famine as a media event was that this was the first time that famine images were competitively sourced among media organisations (Van der Gaag and Nash, 1987) and the ensuing coverage achieved significant results. First, as a consequence, the increased donorship led to an enormous growth of organisations and the distinction between relief and development work became blurred (Lidchi 1993, p.107). During this period, divisions between the aims of education and fundraising functions in charity organisations became exacerbated (Lissner, 1977; Lidchi, 1993) as communications messages during the crisis focused on the immediate and short-term disaster work while the educationalist messages emphasised the long term complexities of development and showed beneficiaries participating in their own progress (Van der Gaag and Nash 1987, p.68).

²³ In 1985 Live Aid put on a 16 hour pop concert in London and Philadelphia and broadcast to 108 countries with an estimated viewing audience of 1.6 billion people. The event broke previous charity donations and spawned the new culture of celebrity events and fundraising.

The Van der Gaag and Nash report, *Images of Africa: The UK Report* (1987) evaluated the coverage of the Ethiopian famine by Northern NGOs. Their assessment concluded that the imagery used confirmed rather than challenged the racist stereotypes of Africa and Africans, turned the suffering population into objects and had capitalised on their suffering. Central to the questioning that occurred among NGO management was how to represent subjects with dignity – and how to change the focus from simple negativity that ‘conveyed the helplessness and the passivity of Ethiopians not their dignity or partnership in development’ (1993, p.110; for a fuller discussion of this see Lidchi 1993). Media reporting supported the NGO imagery and was also seen to have ‘packaged, labelled and coded “Africa” for easy identification, confirming and restocking the racist images rooted in the west’s colonial past’ (ibid., 1993, p.110). The report noted, however, that audiences did not take away a single message from these campaigns and that many people viewed the graphic images as unethical. In turn this opened debates about representational ethics and raised questions about the basis on which funds were sought and given.

Other parts of the report criticised individual photographers and accused them of abusing their power, by disrespecting the rights of the subjects they filmed. It went on to ask pertinent ethical questions about photographic practice. One of the main lines of questioning in the Van der Gaag and Nash report centred on the notion of respect for the agency of the subjects in distress. ‘Had the subjects been aware they were being photographed? Had they had the choice, or the capacity, to protest or exercise informed consent given their emotional and physical state?’ (Lidchi 1993, p.111)²⁴.

The beginnings of ethical regulation in charity representations can be traced effectively to this period as a response to the rising demands for accountability from audiences. The post-Ethiopia discussions prompted a distinct shift in imagery from the negative depictions of the suffering, passive innocent, to narratives of the resilient victim, told through positive imagery. This was widely considered as an ‘ethical’ solution and as being able to provide more truthful representations in opposition to the ‘false’ negative imagery seen until that point (van der Gaag and

²⁴ It is worth pointing out that this is disputed by many photographers. For example, in an interview with D.J.Clark (2009) the photographer, Wossan, who had been on assignment during the disaster, rebuts the assertions Van der Gaag and Nash’s questions imply. He said: “The people of Korem were desperate and my impression was there was no objection to being filmed. Presuming they did not have the capacity to make a judgement in itself is demeaning” (Clark 2009, p. 272).

Nash, 1987; Lidchi, 1993; Benthall, 1993; Dogra, 2007). The development organisation community identified and emphasised a new category of the human subject: 'a new orthodoxy of development prized the autonomous, free individual – the 'subject in expectancy' – which was revealed and mobilized by real development' (Lidchi 1993, p.342).

Before 1985 there was an absence of written guidelines on images but, as a result of the Ethiopian famine, Oxfam, Christian Aid and War on Want chose to address these issues and began discussions about appropriate images and how best to produce material which could challenge racist attitudes (Van der Gaag and Nash 1987, p.70). In addition there was a wider collective movement to standardise representational practices across the NGO industry and the General Assembly of European NGOs adopted a *Code of Conduct on Images Related to the Third World* (1989) to provide standard guidelines for fundraising NGOs and to encourage discussion among stakeholders on the appropriateness of materials produced. The main principles of the code affirmed the values of equality and dignity and recommended feedback and inclusion of opinions from the Southern parties being represented. This marked a major shift in thinking and a new emphasis on the agency of the people portrayed.

Benthall (1993) considers this document a landmark in the history of development education communications although nevertheless it still contained numerous shortcomings. Firstly the code does not give consideration to direct appeal fundraising messages and secondly, technical problems in the code make some guidelines ineffective in practice. The third guideline states, 'Accounts given by the people concerned should be presented rather than the interpretations of the third party' (1989, Art.3) yet this fails to acknowledge the practices of filming and the ability to manipulate through the choice of the subject, to pose leading questions and to edit messages to conform to pre-set narratives. The fifth guideline states that messages should be constructed in a way 'that generalisations are avoided in the minds of the public' (1989, Art.5) but the ways that messages are interpreted cannot be guaranteed by its producers (Benthall, 1993; also Hall, 1997).

The post-famine introspection among agencies and stakeholders led to a shift in tropes of suffering and started to reflect more positivity. This happened concurrently with an expansion in the number and scope of humanitarian organisations and the activities they supported and has also altered their understandings of successful communications work. Smillie (1995) argues it had the effect of

merging of educationalist aims and fundraising to unite under the function of visibility, negating the rift in communications functions previously identified (Lissner, 1977; Lidchi, 1993). Although the greatest NGO investment in public communication was and remains fundraising, the importance of development education and advocacy has increased. Educating Northern publics, including schoolchildren, on global issues and influencing the policies of Northern governments are also now seen as core function of visibility (Dogra 2007, p.162).

In 2006 a revised *Code of Conduct on Images and Messages* provided a framework of guiding principles that was designed to be more workable in practice (in comparison to the previous prescriptive code that gave guidance on what *not* to do) (Manzo 2008, p.637). In addition it specifically addresses the use of children as photographic subjects and their rights. It states that 'within the need to reflect reality, we strive to conform to the highest standards in relation to children's rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); as children are the subjects most frequently portrayed' (Code of Conduct on Images and Messages, 2006, p.3).

Another significant event in the questioning of the ethical responsibilities of the photographer was heightened by the controversy of the iconic photograph taken by Kevin Carter in 1993. His Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph taken in southern Sudan of a famine-stricken child being stalked by a vulture raised many questions about photographers' responsibilities to the people they photograph and their accountability for their behaviour (or lack of it) in the situations they witnessed (Campbell et al., 2005). The image was first published in the New York Times on 23 March 1993 and prompted a flurry of criticism directed at Carter for not assisting the child directly. Along with the acclaim of the Pulitzer Prize came the critical questioning of his personal ethical code of practice and those in the photographic profession more generally. In the exhibition *Imaging Famine* (2005) the issue of responsibility, instigated by this photograph, was identified as a key theme for igniting discussion on the topic of how disasters are imaged. Part of this questioning centred on the roles and responsibilities of the photographers and how to include the opinions of the subjects in the images. The commentary supporting the exhibition asked whether there should be a moral code which stated when photographers should intervene and when they should merely witness and take pictures (Campbell et al., 2005, p.20). Provocatively the organisers of the event also introduced the

role of the photographic subjects into the dilemma, which is often omitted from discussions. They asked,

‘The photographer is often criticised for not considering the dignity of their subjects – for preying on people at the lowest moment of their lives, too weak to muster a response or run from the gaze of the lens. Or could it be that this is all victims of atrocity and disaster can do? Be photographed. Is this in itself a strategy for survival, offering their image in return for aid provided by an organisation that needs those pictures to raise the funds to buy that aid?’ (Campbell et al., 2005, p.20)

The controversy over the Carter image also illustrated the temptation for NGOs to temporarily disregard NGO codes of ethics²⁵ for more immediate fundraising benefits. The media attention made the image into a generic symbol of starvation that created a political testimony to the famine in Sudan and was adopted by Save the Children (SCF) for fundraising campaigns, despite the fact they had no operations in the country (Perlmutter, 1998). The irony of this campaign was that the image was used in the name of humanitarianism and although proved beneficial for charity fundraising, it provided no benefits for victims of the Sudanese famine, not for the girl imaged in the photograph. Perlmutter claims the story of this particular image is ‘a prime example of how an icon of suffering may have no more effect outside the world of discourse elites than a tourist photo of an exotic foreign land’ (1998, p.28). The repercussions of the use of this image by SCF attracted harsh criticisms from both its own staff and from the NGO community, reminiscent of the ones from the 1984-85 period, but it also provided proof that moral sentiment and fundraising success (rather than social transformation and policy change which are sometimes claimed, Yenkin, 2009) can be encouraged through negative imagery (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1997).

These selected events are not intended to provide a complete inventory of the history of controversial imagery; however they evidence the main streams of ethical issues that unite the concerns in the practice of humanitarian photography. The aims of imaging of subjects who are voyeuristically offered up as a spectacle of passivity for Western audiences are designed with

²⁵ A similar case which highlights the continued symbiotic relationship of the imagery of the media and NGOs, was the UNICEF direct appeal for the Pakistani flood victims in 2010. The image of a two-year old boy called Reza Khan was published where he and his twin brother were lying in a shelter covered with flies. The photograph was taken by AP photographer Mohammad Sajjad and appeared in numerous media publications. The media image had Reza sucking on an empty bottle with his eyes closed while the UNICEF appeal selected a frame in which Reza is aware of the photographer and gazes upward into the lens. This image appeared in the Guardian as a black and white page-spread appeal on 1 September 2010.

persuasive intent and this contributes to shrouding this field of imaging in sensitivity. The practice continues to attract ethical questions around issues of rights of subjects, duties of producers and speculation over the extent and degree of harm and benefit to its subjects. The next section presents the theoretical context of photography which informs the way images are viewed, the practices and positions of power in the process – all which affect the way social actors approach 'ethics in the production and consumption of images.

2.3 *The Theoretical Status of the Photographically Real*

Authors such as Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault effectively provide the theoretical basis of analyses of visual culture, relevant to this thesis. Their critical positions have led to a widespread rejection of the idea that acts of looking, and photographic recording, can be separated from relationships of power and control. These perspectives, albeit representing different theoretical positions, contribute collectively to the undermining of photography's ability to document the world neutrally and objectively. Theoretically the uses of the medium are never innocent, and are always constructed through various practices, technologies and knowledges (Rose, 2007) which is in contradiction to the cultural conception of photography as an objective recording device. This section reviews how these theoretical streams contribute and interact with the understandings of the truth-status of the photographic realm.

The dominant focus of theory revolves around the notion of 'the real' and the medium's political capacity which attracts charges of objectification, violence and exploitation. This line of thinking is particularly central to the Marxist influenced streams of thought on the photography on photographing humanitarian subjects. Marxist cultural critic, Walter Benjamin asserts in his essay '*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*' (orig.1936) that photography and its reproducibility dissolved the artistic 'aura' and replaced this with expanded possibilities for the political use of images. He argues that the ability for photographic reproduction in effect is to create the simulacrum, obscuring 'reality', and bringing aesthetics into the realm of the political. Photographs turn images into aesthetic objects for the entertainment of spectators and turn human suffering into exploitation by reducing the meaning of suffering into the simple observation: 'The World is Beautiful'. Benjamin makes the argument that 'the 'new objectivity' [...] has even

succeeded in making misery itself an object of pleasure by treating it stylishly and technical perfection' (1970) thereby trivialising human suffering.

The notion of simulacrum and suspicions of the 'truth' politicise imagery and insert power relations into the core of analyses. In *The Burden of Representation* (1993) John Tagg offers an historical perspective on the photograph, drawing a powerful link to the institutional uses of the image, such as evidence, maintenance of order, as a method of record keeping and as surveillance. Relying on Bentham's notion of Panopticon, Tagg asserts the centrality of power relations in all representations. For Tagg, it is 'not the power of the camera but the power of the apparatuses...which deploy it and guarantee the authority of the images it constructs to stand as evidence or register a truth' (1993, p.64). Tagg's institutional focus argues that 'Photography as such has no identity...It is a flickering across a field of institutional spaces. It is a field we must study, not photography as such' (1993, p. 63) making the visual inherently tied to imperialism and the power relations that it projects key to understanding photography and representation.

Structuralism and semiotics have contributed prominently to the understanding of constructing meanings through signs. Most prominently through Roland Barthes' semiology which adopts the stance that truth is constructed and that meaning is anchored to systems of signs, and is not an objective force. Language (including visual language) is located in a system of signs existing in the semiotic system. In spite of acknowledging the power relations inherent in taking photographs Barthes' position maintains the importance of the referential accuracy that the image is able to supply by portraying a still moment, of fixed time and space, in which 'the power of authentication exceeds the power of representation' (1981, p.88-89). Susan Sontag also claims that the photograph is based in its ontological space and time, although is capable of distortions and that 'there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture' (Sontag 1979, p.5). In this she comes close to Barthes' position that the photograph provides a 'shared hallucination (on the one hand "it is not there," on the other "but it has indeed been")': a mad image, chafed by reality' (Barthes 1981, p.115). John Tagg however, disagrees with the realist position of Barthes, and views his stance as naïve, especially when he states that 'every photograph is a result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic' (Tagg 1993, p.2). Despite the disagreement on the significance

and ability of the photographic medium to project the referent with accuracy, all authors concur with the position that photography is an unruly medium with an inherent capacity to manipulate and exploit.

The work of Foucault demonstrates the relationship between power and knowledge and expels any claims that images are representations of singular truths. He introduces the notion of plurality and the 'regime of truth' which describes the circular relationship that truth has to power and the ways power relations are multi-positioned within regimes of practices. Lidchi (1993) argues that contemporary NGOs and their visual communications are complicit with the processes of this 'truth' production rather than truth reflection as the claims attached to humanitarian-themed photography implicitly assert. The cherished belief in the referential accuracy and neutrality associated by audiences in the genre of documentary and photojournalism (Rossler, 2000; Wells, 2003) has also become a conviction of principle in the work of professional photographers. According to Szarkowski, the potential for photographic truth has become a shared vision among photographers. He states 'the public believed that the photograph could not lie, and it was easier for the photographer if he believed it too, or pretended to' (2003, p.99). These cultural beliefs in practice contradict the central concern of theory: photography's inability to reflect truth.

Post-modernism introduced the assertions of 'hyper-realities' and with the simultaneous rise in the potential for technological manipulation, the social understanding of the truth-value of photography has been further problematised. The evidentiary function, i.e. the photograph's referential accuracy, is contested in the famous essay by the post-modern theorist Jean Baudrillard titled *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (orig.1988, in English 1995). In his view representations are fundamentally to be mistrusted and are severely inadequate in capturing the appearance of the world. His core argument is that the real no longer exists, and he shifts the moment of reality to the interpretation of reality and that reality itself is something separable from signs. This media-dominated contemporary world exists in the phenomenon of hyper-realism, as he explains:

'The end of the spectacle brings with it the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, the meticulous reduplication of the real, preferably through another reproductive medium such as advertising and photography. Through reproduction from one medium into another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death, but it also draws strength from its own destruction, becoming the real for its own sake, a fetishism of

the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denegation and its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.' (Baudrillard 1993, pp.71-72)

His argument does not deny that situations are witnessed by the camera; rather he sees hyper-realities and simulacra (as opposed to the logic of signs) as substitutes for reality which have no foundation in experience. The extent to which events are mediated and portrayed by only a few select images, mean that they become contaminated by 'the structural unreality of images' (Baudrillard 1995, pp.46-47), implying that the more information that is provided translates into less of its understanding.

The theoretical context presents photography operating in a world in which simulations and simulacra create a sphere of flickering hyper-realities which has been accepted as a permanent feature of mass commodity culture. Despite these influential arguments the Marxist approach to the capitalist commodity culture of images still characterises much critical work on photography (Evans, 1997). Sontag effectively sums up this social understanding of photographic meaning and production that underlies the approaches.

'A capitalist society requires a culture based on images, it needs to furnish vast amounts of entertainment in order to stimulate buying and anaesthetise the injuries of class, race and sex...The camera's twin capacities, to subjectivise reality and to objectify it, ideally serves these needs and strengthens them. Cameras define reality in two ways essential to the workings of an advanced industrial society: as a spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers). The production of images also furnishes a ruling ideology. Social change is replaced by a change in images. The freedom to consume a plurality of images and goods is equated with freedom itself.' (Sontag 1979, p.178-9).

The struggle over truth, its ontological and epistemological standing, makes the concerns of authenticity²⁶ central to theoretical thought and to the social understandings of the medium, which in turn construct a dominant discourse affecting evaluations of ethics of photography. The theme of

²⁶ In semiotic terms realism means that the photograph is produced with a real-life component i.e. the referent, in contrast to digitally produced images appearing as the 'real'. The term authenticity in Benjamin's theories of reproduction of images refers to the quality which cannot be reproduced i.e. paintings are unreplicable. The term authenticity is used in this thesis to refer to the claims of accuracy to the situation during filming where elements are not staged or manipulated to depict events actually not occurring.

authenticity is the most valued attribute in the genre of documentary²⁷ which is not limited to naturalistic accuracy but has also expanded to considerations of ‘seriousness of purpose, detail and depth of research, and to the integrity of story-telling’ (Wells 2003, p. 252). This fascination of authentic depiction is proceeded and sustained as ‘a perfectly realistic and objective recording of the visible world because (from its origin) it has been assigned *social uses* that are held to be ‘realistic’ and ‘objective’” (Bourdieu 1990, p.74). The theoretical focus on the truth-status and power in photography makes assumptions about the ways social actors are positioned in production and how power operates on the level of practice. The next section turns to visual theory to expand on the constructs of power and positions of social actors in the interaction of photography.

2.3.1 Gaze, Power and Agency in Photographic Interaction

In *The Society of the Spectacle* (orig. 1967), as one of the most influential texts of situationist ideas, Guy Debord presents arguments which emphasise representations as exerting influence over social order and the nature of consumerist society that promote the constant transformation of lived experience through the spectacle. Representation, he argues, has replaced actual interaction, becoming society’s dominant mode of production as the process, outcome and the goal form the ‘very heart of society’s real unreality’. In this view the image and the practices of gazing become central to forging social relationships among people, in which the spectacle is ‘not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images’ (1999, p.95).

His thesis is that ‘the spectacle’ becomes a frame which envelops every part of society, uniting the practices of production and consumption. This position hints at a collective construction influencing the visual spheres of images consumers occupy, as news, entertainment, and advertising. For Debord, this is the ‘the omnipresent celebration of choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice’ (ibid., p.143). Consumption becomes an expression of its producers, and as such, it positions viewing audiences trapped in the gaze, and as ones who have limited capacity to contest the forced imagery that surrounds them. In other work on consumption, however, commentators such as Stuart Hall (orig. 1980) challenge the passivity of spectators and argued that even though dominant ideologies are inserted in the

²⁷ This demand for authenticity also exists in NGO communications which are primarily located in the genre of documentary. This was witnessed in the Barnardo controversy that pushed limits of audience tolerance with blatant images ‘constructed’ for particular narratives.

‘preferred readings’, consumption is also a productive process where viewers are able to contest the intended messages (Hall 2001, pp.507-517).

The notion of the gaze has widely filtered into the social sciences’ approach to photography as a way of theorising how power operates in the practices and in the processes of image-making. Not restricted to positioning subjects and spectators, Foucault’s work also involves the concept of the gaze and in particular the institutional gaze as central to the production of knowledge and regulation of subjects (1977) which operate both in social and institutional contexts through frameworks of power.

The gaze was originally described as the two-fold nature of looking theorised by the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (orig. 1977) as an interaction, ‘in the scopic field, the gaze is outside, I am looked at, that is to say, I am the picture’ (1998, p.126). The gaze, appropriated for the theorising of the photographic interactions, positions its photographic subjects as the ones lacking power with power attributed to those holding the camera and the ones viewing. The polarisation of positions (and power) from the ones who have and the ones who do not, is complicit with the Marxist readings of photography set within a view of society as an integrated network joined together by the production of a general form of consent through dominant ideologies. Both psychoanalytic and Marxist understandings have limited consideration for the multiplicity of possible gazes, which assist in setting up a violent philosophical inheritance, most emphatically expressed by Sontag: ‘Still there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed’ (Sontag 1979, p.14). Similar sentiments are expressed by Roland Barthes: ‘The Photograph is violent; not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed’ (1981, p.91)²⁸.

²⁸ One of the ethnographic studies on photographic interactions in public photography was conducted by Lisa Henderson on how ethical considerations of consent and access were negotiated. Her conclusion supports the idea of photography as a form of domination: ‘what the practical contingencies of public photography therefore suggest is the essentially exploitative relationship that prevails between photographers and subjects’ (2003, p. 285).

Lutz and Collins (2003) complicate the framework of the duality of gazes, occurring between the masses and the rulers and present a typology of seven kinds of gaze²⁹ expanding the possibility of alternative gazes and one that acknowledges that of the photographic subject. Their findings support the polysemic nature of images in which the multiplicity of gazes contribute to the ambiguous status of photography, and the less recognised gaze of the subject that 'may be difficult to find in the heavy crisscrossing traffic of more privileged gazes of producers and consumers, contemporary stories of contestable power are told nonetheless' (Lutz and Collins 2003, p.371). The existence of these contesting gazes and their challenges to the assumed power of the privileged gaze of (Western) viewers is seldom expressed. Edward Said, in *After the Last Sky*, confronts the assumptions commonly held:

'I would like to think that we [Palestinian people] are not just the people seen or looked at in these photographs: We are also looking at our observers...we too are looking, we too are scrutinizing, assessing, judging. We are more than someone's object. We do more than stand passively in front of whoever, for whatever reason, has wanted to look at us.' (1998, p.156)

The emphasis on photographic exploitation and objectification speaks powerfully on how the colonising and dominating gaze of the West towards the global South has become engrained but has also potentially diminished the possibility of attributing any validity to contesting gazes. In addition, the theory of the gaze inadvertently places photographers in assumed positions of domination in the field: as the all-seeing and all-powerful actors in the interaction. Van de Ven (2011) argues this is an inaccurate account of the process which highlights the exploitative capacity set in theory rather than of the camera. Reflecting on her own photographic practice she concludes:

'The recipients of the gaze turn out *not* to be powerless, *not* helplessly "captured". They look back and the entire photographic scenario unravels. I am too conspicuous to be invisible, and invisibility is a precondition for the gaze as it has most often been conceptualized. The recognition that the camera creates a stage around itself also exposes the illusion, still widespread, that the photographer has to be invisible to be "real"' (2011, p.144)

This assumed power which theory accords photographers is supported by other discursive positions that attempt to validate and justify photographers' actions. One position is that the photographers'

²⁹ The seven kinds of gaze identified are the photographer's gaze, the institutional gaze, the reader's gaze, the non-Western subject's gaze, the Western gaze, the refracted gaze and the academic gaze (Lutz and Collins 2003, p.354).

actions are justified in their roles as eyewitnesses, who perform a social function of documenting historical evidence (see Burke, 2001). Encapsulated in this notion is the passivity of the photographer/witness which separates the photographer from the human interaction and raises criticisms of voyeurism. Alternatively the role of bearing witness, a preferred classification by academics and practitioners, offers a more inclusive term to counter-act the subject position of the voyeur and connotes a personal responsibility for the events witnessed beyond the act of viewing (Tait 2011, p.1221). The ability to take on personal responsibility for the situations witnessed and fulfilling duties towards subjects are interrogated by working photographers, Chanarin and Broomberg (2009) who define the responsibility of photographer through an emotional contract with the subjects who are being filmed. The process of filming creates a photographic promise, or a silent contract the photographer enters into with the subjects who endow the photographer with trust to promote change and the responsibility to provide assistance. Yet this promise is often broken and the hope vested in the photographer and his or her images are often misplaced because of the inability of the photographer to guarantee responses to the images. This is an ethical consideration not addressed in the theory of the gaze, and the latent assumptions of power that are assumed by the actors in production.

In a novel case study on humanitarian image production a more complex scenario was revealed than the dynamics traditionally explained by the gaze. DJ Clark's findings obscure the subject-positions that the gaze of the unfortunate assumes and focus on the complexity of assessing ethical criteria of dignity and subject rights. As a photographer and a researcher, Clark (2004) documented the processes of filming on a charity-commissioned assignment with Bob Geldof to Ethiopia in 2003³⁰. This case study challenged many preconceived ideas about the subject lacking agency and ability to negotiate their self-representations. In addition, contrary to arguments of photographic exploitation by NGOs, his findings give weight to the arguments presented by NGOs who justify their use of images as legitimate because of the positive impact on the lives of beneficiaries.

³⁰ Clark documented the process of filming and the selection of images of a baby named Mekanik Philipos in a feeding centre. The findings suggested that the selection of final images followed the template of the stereotypical image of African disaster even though alternative images to those of malnourished children were provided by photographers. Nevertheless the final image showed a malnourished baby and the white aid worker, in this case Geldof, 'reaching out to heal the child held in the mother's arms' (2004, p.702). Clark describes the distributed image as literal and simply composed, in a manner to tell the straightforward narrative of salvation confirming the conventional preferences for negative images for famine-fundraising and media reporting.

Clark's interview with the child's mother after filming revealed she did not view the image as undignified and felt that it had been a way of helping her child (2004, p.703), which it in fact had, as medical attention secured by the NGO returned her baby to good health. Clark's findings complicate the notion of subject dignity and while Van der Gaag and Nash (1987) see this in terms of a straightforward assessment by producers, Clark argues that it is in fact more complex from the subjects' positions in the field. Clark's findings point out the vagaries of assessing dignity and show how it depends on who is assessing the criteria and what it means in practice. There is a trade off between denying the subjects the right to participate and the responsibility to depict subjects with dignity. The notion of the gaze holds assumptions about the social actors involved in the process and these assumptions about subject positions have ramifications for the interpretations of ethical criteria.

2.4 *Representation of the Other*

The images of 'the Rest' by 'the West' (Hall, 1992) are encoded constructions within familiar discursive themes that continuously recreate and reinterpret differences within these two categories in a stereotypical dualism (Hulme in Hall, 1992). The representations perpetuated by the West have been messages of suffering, victimhood and passivity of the global South (Lidchi, 1993; Campbell, 2003; Clark, 2009) and the visual is the main driver for these narratives and discourses as they circulate in the contemporary global mediascape (Appadurai, 1994). The medium of photography provides the immediacy (at a distance) and the authority to satisfy the tendency of audiences 'to prefer the schematic authority of a text to the disorientations of direct encounters with the human' (Said 2003, p.93). These exaggerated simplifications of populations in the global South construct the knowledges and discourses and become one of the main sources of knowledge about the Other of the global South for Western audiences. The knowledges of the global South are constructed by a 'textual attitude' (Said 2003, p.92) whereby the interpretations of those images recreate and reimagine new associations of the global South. Said explains this process of imaginations of the Orient: 'the Orient was a word which later accrued to it a wide field of meanings, associations, and connotations, and that these did not necessarily refer to the real Orient but to the field surrounding the word' (2003, p. 203). The images of the global Southern poor solidify discursive constructs and

become creative sites for the continuation and recreation of what it means to be disadvantaged and a victim.

The textual attitude has developed into a complex dialectic of reinforcement imposing unequal relationships between those who construct representations but are not engaged in direct responsibility to the subjects they portray. The 'Other' photographic subjects are placed within a dynamic of always being as accessible and are 'unable to resist the projects, images, or mere descriptions devised for it' (p.94). The ethical imperative belying this representational dilemma is evident and the momentum to rectify the representations of the global South's 'dreadful secondariness' (Said 1989, p.207) is still ongoing. Humanitarian imaging remains embroiled in the continued crisis that has not produced workable resolutions or frameworks to evaluate images and their representational effects.

2.4.1 Constructing Childhood and Humanitarian Symbols

The iconography of the child has been well-documented in historical analyses of campaigning (Lamers, 2000; Dogra, 2007). Indeed NGO appeals have long focused on images of children but, in the period after 1984, the trend of showing children as the main subjects in visibility campaigns became more pronounced so that images seemed to 'all the time show more and more babies' (Smillie 1995, p.137). The child is suited to the uses of manipulation and simplification for she stands as 'a victim of circumstance but she is no victimiser, and the drama of cruelty in which she finds herself is surely not mutual' (Linfield 2004, p.74). Vulnerability and innocence are characteristics most recognisable in the image of the child.

As an academic category there is no consensus around the concepts of 'child' and 'childhood' because such terms fail to capture the heterogeneity of childhoods and the cultural, historical and social factors which influence their local manifestations (James and Prout, 1997). Despite the academic insistence on the complexity of childhoods, a wider discourse of the universal, natural state of childhood remains prevalent in national and international policy, based on the ideas of childhood as an enclosed space with connotations of safety, security and innocence (Boyden, 1990; Burman, 1994a). The representations of victimhood largely rely upon the engrained myth of childhood innocence and the existence of a universal childhood based on the image of the child as

representing the characteristics of an ahistorical, apolitical, universal humanitarian subject essential to securing emotive response (Malkki, 1996; Raatikainen, 2000; Rosler, 2000). Malkki, from the lens of cultural anthropology, identifies the ideal victim as one who is 'at once feminine and maternal, childlike and innocent – is an image we use to cut across cultural and political difference, when our interest is to address the very heart of our humanity' (1996, p.388).

This cultural construction of childhood, however, is an adult one, based on Western ideology (Boyden, 1990; Holland, 1992; Cannella and Viruru, 2004). Innocence as a central feature of childhood is anchored in the Romantic discourse of childhood in which the child is defined by weakness and incapacity (Holland, 1992). There is an insistence on innocence and 'a need to define children in terms of what adults are not: not sexual, not vicious, not ugly, not conscious, not damaged' (Higonnet 1998, p.224). Yet the Western construction of childhood is binary rather than single and Boyden speaks of two perceptions of childhood: the positive images of innocence which feature children as victims and vulnerable and secondly, the negative images which portray the child as deviant or one who has lost innocence (1990, pp.191-196). These coincide with the dominant Romantic and Puritan discourses of childhood upon which Western ideologies of childhood lay (Montgomery, 2003; Wells, 2009). This type of binary construct of children as vulnerable or as deviant coincides with a parallel binary construct that addresses the category of 'the poor', which according to Bauman, reveal more about the audiences than the individuals under scrutiny. He argues, 'The treatment reserved for the poor, the way in which pity and condemnation are mixed, help and fault-finding are balanced, is a matter for society at large rather than for the poor themselves' (Bauman, 1999).

The notion of childhood is positioned in opposition to that of adulthood as Holland (1992) identifies this as a collective need of adults to view unhappy childhoods as a way of assuring they are back in control. Billington (2006) argues that current anxieties about children are 'in part a smoke-screen for our own adult anxieties – about how we should be in the world, about normality and about our own futures and sense of mortality' (2006, p.3): in other words, a reflection of ourselves. Shulamith Firestone (1971) also commented on the confirmation of adult power and sentimentality:

‘It is clear that the myth of childhood happiness flourishes so widely not because it satisfies the needs of children but because it satisfies the needs of adults. In a culture of alienated people, the belief that everyone has at least one good period in their life, free of care and drudgery dies hard. And obviously you can’t expect it in your old age. So, it must be you’ve already had it. This accounts for the fog of sentimentality surrounding any discussion of childhood or children. Everyone is living out some private dream on their behalf’ (1971, p.93).

This has relevance for the study of humanitarian imagery as the child remains a powerful symbol, representing particular characteristics and qualities that facilitate the emotive immediacy that visibility campaigns require (Firestone, 1972; Burman, 1994b). The cultural appreciation of the power in the image of the clear eyes of a child looking into the camera provides a punctum³¹ that continues to resonate, leaving spectators with little doubt to what response is demanded. The child-image, whether portrayed as the lone child drawing on discourses of child-saving or with resiliency and agency drawing on the discourse of child-rights, remains a cultural trope which prompt spectatorship compassion, pity and care (Wells 2009, p.26-47).

The standardised symbolic markers of the poor child from the global South which adopt common conventions in form and composition have been documented by numerous authors. The Black or non-white child is a powerful symbol (Holland, 1992; Burman, 1994a) and images of the lone child signify abandonment and elicit a call to ‘save’ the child. Holland (1992) claims that women and children make more dramatic images when men are not included supporting Berger’s thesis of ‘men act and women appear’ (1972, p.47). Because men symbolise potency and politics they rarely appear in charity campaigns. Images are also gendered and age-specific in shaping the responses of the viewers. The use of younger girls is more effective than older children and boys are rarely documented (Holland, 1992; Wells, 2009).

From the perspective of NGOs communications child images are considered ‘safe’ and maintain credibility through an ‘innocence-based solidarity’ (Slim 1997, p.350). Academics however have seen the images as more problematic. Manzo argues that child iconography provides the means through which NGOs present and produce themselves as rights-bearing organisations and childhood iconography expresses institutional ideals and values of neutrality, impartiality and

³¹ Punctum is Barthes’ notion of the instantaneous and unexplainable ‘sting’ of certain photographs that captures our attention and disturbs normal viewing habits (Barthes 1981, p.51).

solidarity. Despite these clear symbolic associations that seem to suit messages of humanitarianism, Manzo further argues that an incongruity emerges and such representations can also be historically interpreted as a colonial metaphor (2008, p.635-636) so that the symbolic image of childhood is laden with multiple connotations that reproduce the paternalistic patterns of colonial imperialism (Campbell, 2003; Clark, 2009).

Dogra asserts that this ambiguity serves NGO organisational strategies. She attacks the use of positive child imagery by NGOs as being more beneficial to organisational strategy, than as a significant way of affecting narratives of victimhood. She argues that 'to a large extent, 'positive' imagery is a lazy way out and lets NGOs ignore messy questions of power and ideology' (Dogra 2007, p.168). This criticism complicates analyses of ethics and undermines the wide acceptance of positive imagery as a method to promote dignified and ethical representations.

Further academic criticism, in line with Dogra's work, is directed at the emphasis on positivity and resiliency adopted by NGOs and claims that the shift to images with hopeful self-determination has led to an over-humanised subject (Chouliaraki, 2011). Thematically, the over-humanised subject is set in scenes which lack evidence of urban life and the historical context of colonialism, leading to a 'safe' image which does not challenge NGO narratives. The standardisation of images 'merely supports the argument of the appeal and does not even portray the poor directly but only hints at an unequal world' (Dogra 2007, p.164). The political effects of these representations construct children of the global South as needy helpless victims, or happy unknowing victims, simultaneously stigmatising their parents and families as deficient caretakers (Burman, 1994b) thereby cementing the role of the West to take over that duty. The child's gaze is a confirmation of that power of the West over the global South (Holland, 1992) and fails to challenge the complacent certainty of the superior position of the West. These narratives and effects reinforce colonial metaphors of infantilised and feminised places that enter a relationship of paternalism, passivity and incapacity of those 'in need' (Burman, 1994a,b; Campbell, 2003). Furthermore they secure the West in a 'flexible positional superiority' as Said argued in *Orientalism* which places the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships to the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand' (Said 2003, p.7). Photography in the name of humanitarianism is seen to covertly defend this position and the 'positive' images of the child operate as a method to deflect this criticism.

2.4.2 Mediating Pity and Image Effects

Political action to alleviate suffering is the central function of humanitarian movements and is governed by a *politics of pity* that dominates how morality is mediated. This is the argument of Luc Boltanski in *Distant Suffering* (1999) where, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt, he identifies and defines the politics of pity and the specific character of distant suffering in the contemporary moment. His arguments draw on the concept of the spectacle in which the act of observation has substituted for action and analyse the dynamic of pity which operates between two categories: those who are regarded as the fortunate ones who observe the unfortunate ones and who do not share their suffering (2003, p.3). How to mediate between these two categories, and how to facilitate an emotional connection inciting pity, despite the physical distance, is the main dilemma facing NGO communications. Boltanski writes,

‘The particular problem that a politics of pity must confront thus concerns this paradoxical treatment of distance. To avoid the local such a politics must bring together particular situations and thereby convey them, that is to say across a distance, while retaining as far as possible the qualities conferred on them by a face to face encounter’ (1999, p.12)

Boltanski’s position is that the mediated solidarity which exists between the distant spectator and the unfortunate who is not present is precisely what appeals to the audience’s moral sense (ibid., 1999, p.13), and is the key to social change. The lens of mediation is presented as a productive instrument of meaning and is regarded as a social practice located between subjects and objects that guarantee their existence as subjects and objects, thereby making social meanings possible. Mediation in this definition prevents subjects and objects from ‘immediate encounter’ and institutional technologies construct the ‘mediated encounter’ (Debrix, 2003). This perspective substitutes the binary and static positions of social actors which dominate the perspectives of gaze, into the objectifying producer and victimised subject of the camera, but this perspective expands the potential connections into ones which are malleable and flexible. Boltanski interprets mediating distance as the moral force of viewing distant suffering, albeit laden with anxieties on the part of audiences of how to best participate in the struggle, and with the dilemma from the communications perspective of how to construct messages that create the ideal distance and identify the ‘the ideal unfortunate’ and which resonates with audiences.

The complications of identifying and constructing the ideal subject (who appears unconstructed) and is able to connect audiences is exacerbated by the questioning of the truth-status of photographs and these have produced a general mistrust and a 'trial-like attitude' (Rancière 2009, p.95) from audiences. In *Intolerable Image* (2009) Jacques Rancière provides a contemporary analysis on the veracity of the photograph and how image-effects are understood by society. He claims that cultural understandings of photographic effects take the form of a causal relationship: from the act of perception, affection is produced, followed by comprehension of the issue which results in action (Rancière 2009, p.103). This is particularly relevant in the context of humanitarianism which relies on the evidentiary nature of photographs as arguments for, and preconditions of, social change.

This rationality was also expressed by Berger who concludes that the audience's own moral inadequacy comes under question in these images, and this realisation 'shocks' just as much as the image and presents the viewer with a political choice. The viewer either 'shrugs off this sense of inadequacy as being only too familiar, or else he thinks of performing some form of penance – of which the purest example would be to make a contribution to OXFAM or UNICEF...The picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody' (2003, p.290). In the view of Berger, the audience is faced with a political decision – of whether to act or not – however in this process the issue being depicted becomes depoliticised. This echoes Benjamin who argues that human suffering is trivialised through the photograph (1970) so that while theoretically photographs can be seen as a political vehicle with the capacity for the perpetuation of power relations and propaganda, they are generally understood as a reflection of truth and as remnants of authentic description by audiences.

Sontag (1979) argues that the constant stream of harrowing images has desensitised people from understanding true suffering and has led audiences to lapse into compassion fatigue. The attention deficit argument is also at the core her later works in which she writes: 'Compassion fatigue means becoming so used to the spectacle of dreadful events, misery or suffering that we stop noticing them' (Sontag 2003, p.13, also see Moeller, 1999). She argues that the notion of reality has been complicated by the profusions of images, in which audiences live 'in a spectacle' (ibid., 2003,

p.109) and results in political impasse which emasculates audiences from taking action and obscures any true understanding of the circumstances of crisis.

Chouliaraki (2006) approaches audience responses from a semiotic approach and her work emphasises the spectatorship of suffering that makes the subjects into objects. She argues that the lack of political response of audiences to messages is not due to their mistrust in the authenticity of the images per se but explainable by the fact that the representations create a situation in which it is impossible to act in a compassionate manner because of the conflicting messages. She further argues that the sufferer of emergencies is positioned as an object of spectacle and one who is not endowed with humanness. She call this position the 'sufferer's ambivalence' and states: 'African refugees were both in danger and dangerous themselves; the Argentinean children were both vulnerable human beings and 'fetishised' body parts; the Nigerian woman was both a woman like 'us' and a voiceless 'other'' (2006, p.148). The traditional assumption of the power of photography - the perception-affection-action equation - is one of causality of this but, as Sontag argues; this has been convoluted by the critique of the spectacle and its underlying suspicions of the real. This jointly creates a public discourse of the intolerable image (Rancière 2009) or, as Chouliaraki (2006) argues, convoluted visual messages. The discourse supports the notion of a potential image which infringes on both audience levels of tolerance and the dignity of the subjects. Much of the commentary is approached through its effects on audiences, and the vulnerable position in which they exist - trapped in the notion of passivity where the evil nature of the image is assumed and the guilt as spectators is promoted (Rancière 2009, p.87). The doubts and inadequacies have produced a stale-mate, with political significance. The actual criticism and the ways photography is discussed have taken 'us from what is intolerable *in the image* to the intolerability *of the image*' (2009, p.88, emphasis added) shifting public concern from the issues being represented to the concern with the representations themselves.

2.5 Chapter Conclusion

Contemporary humanitarian organisations operate in a complex environment in which they have to work to reclaim trust in photographic accuracy in the images they use, nurture solidarity between audiences and the subjects they portray, and promote dignified representations of subjects who are in need. The chapter began by setting the historical context and presented four pivotal events and

sets of images in the history of the production of humanitarian imagery. These events were the tensions surrounding Barnardo's advertising of the 19th century, Save the Children campaigning beginning in 1919, the Ethiopian famine imagery of 1984-85 and the Kevin Carter controversy in 1994. In particular the use of images during the Ethiopian famine demonstrated the importance audiences attach to accuracy and led to a change in the sorts of images proffered by humanitarian organisations. The famine also marked the beginnings of ethical regulation for NGO photography as well as a new emphasis on positive images which came to be seen as more truthful and ethical ways forward for communications.

The chapter then addressed the theoretical status of photographic truth, with theoretical frameworks largely engaging with issues of truth, power and representation. Much of the critical work adopts Marxist streams of thought on the photograph's ability to appropriate, exploit (and even violate) its subjects. It accuses the institutional apparatuses and photographers of being complicit with the exploitation inherent to the medium, which in turn provides a rationale for ethical regulation for organisations that use photography in order to ensure the protection of subjects and to make sure that subject dignity is upheld. Authenticity in representations is also a precondition in order to avoid accusations of manipulation and to promote solidarity among the victims and the viewing audiences.

The last section in the chapter covered the constructions of victimhood and the politics of pity. In order to bridge the distance between the fortunate audiences and the unfortunate victims, the trope of non-Western childhood is relied upon to secure the correct reactions from audiences.

Three emergent concerns were highlighted in the literature presented in this chapter. The overriding concern was that of ethics, particularly important for organisations operating in the humanitarian sector. The emergent conceptual themes included concerns with authenticity. This was reflected in the theoretical approaches to photography which questioned and attempted to position photography through its capacity and incapacity to be reflect the 'real' and its referential accuracy. The cultural concept of the truth-status of photography is cherished by audiences, but remains surrounded by a climate of scepticism.

The issue of subject dignity was first addressed during 1984 and remains a continued theme, evidenced by the conventionalised and 'ethicalised' narratives of the poor which are predominantly depicted through the lens of positive iconography of the child. Analysis of these standardised methods reflects Orientalist critiques as cementing the structures of power and control.

The concept of solidarity arose in the concerns of NGO campaigning and addressing the potential of images to affect the political and moral agency of viewers, which requires a mediated relationship to be facilitated between the suffering Other and the fortunate viewers. Childhood iconography supported this innocence-based solidarity as an apolitical, universal and innocent subject that Western adults are able to connect to in a non-threatening way.

It is not possible to study photography as an isolated and consistent discipline as Tagg (1993) has challenged. The literature informing photography remains in the domain of political effects and photographic truth. The discursive and social organisation of photographic production, consumption and distribution are largely neglected, thereby allowing this research to contribute to discussions of representation through the lens of production. The critical work on representations seems to also assume that the construction of childhoods (and victims) is a highly calculated process and this in part, may be a reflection of the dominance of Marxist thought and those accounts that emphasise the exploitative gaze.

The literature addressed in this chapter presents contradictory assessments of photographic truth, and referential accuracy which depends on the vested interests and disciplinary perspectives addressed. The social understandings attached to the image lie in opposition to the sociological view of the medium that focuses on the political effects and potential readings. With such divisions, assessing its ethics in practice inevitably will be full of the tensions, which this thesis will go on to discuss in detail. The next chapter addresses the methodological issues in this research.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 *Introduction*

The literature review outlined the main bodies of literature which assisted in the development of this research project and informed the ways that the topic of photographic production has been approached. The conclusion from the literature was that research on humanitarian imagery has focused primarily on the reading of images, the politics of representation, and on rhetorical analyses of communications. Research into micro-level processes remains largely absent, with academic critiques largely limited to looking at the photograph as a method of control and exploitation.

The chapter offers a personal account of the processes of fieldwork and analysis and begins by tracing the research journey and its developments, followed with an introduction to the research context of Bangladesh and the reasoning for conducting case studies there. The next section is devoted to presenting the research methodology and epistemological orientation and presenting the research design and demonstrating the reflexive considerations that arose during the research process, such as gaining research access, positionality and the ways it evolved during the course of research. The chapter ends with a discussion on how ethical considerations were evaluated in the research practice.

3.2 *The Research Journey and its Developments*

My research interest was initially triggered during the period of my life when I worked for an international humanitarian organisation where I became aware of a personal conflict between the demands of my position (which required me to promote the work of the organisation by utilising the dominant narratives) and my unease with the stereotypical representations of the global South, which contrasted with my own knowledge and understanding of the situations in the field. I became increasingly critical of the representations used by the organisational apparatuses, and also of their

claims of success. I felt I was put in a position in which I was asked to make selective judgements about campaigning literature, including photographs, prioritising organisational agendas designed to persuade donors to continue funding projects, rather than providing a reflection of the actual conditions. The messaging and images were produced by people who although they spoke as experts had in fact little contact and limited understanding of the language or context of the people they were claiming to speak for. The publicised fieldtrips intended to provide 'exposure' for staff did not make for meaningful interactions to close the social distance between the local beneficiary groups and the aid officials. The communications messages seemed to cement their positions and reinforce their programmes, without the inclusion of the diversity or an acknowledgement of the courage of the people of whom they claimed to be speaking. Therefore my perspective on this research began with a rather critical approach to photographic depictions of vulnerable populations which shared many parallels to the critiques of the photograph and visual regimes of power which were outlined in the literature review.

Preliminary research uncovered a standstill in much photographic theory and writings. The tendency within the social sciences was to adopt critical approaches on single images or on the work of individual photographers. In my view the critiques used to address NGO representations, albeit important, had proved to be somewhat redundant and had limited the avenues for discussion without producing significant changes in the representational practices of NGOs generally. In order to find a new angle on these issues, the research was designed as an investigation into the production of NGO assignments through an ethnographic case study approach. To investigate photography by detaching it from an analysis of the final images as the primary subject of investigation and approaching the topic through exploration of the process involved in the construction of these representational practices, provided, in my view, a potentially fruitful way to expand the discussions.

In the initial stages of research I sought to identify social projects which were designed specifically by the photographic community in Bangladesh to address these imbalances of representation. The reason for this was because the voices of the photographer communities to address the critique seemed largely absent and the use of local photographers appeared as one response proposed to achieve more balanced representations. One such social movement advocating the alternative

development imagery was the Drik photographic organisation (mentioned in the Introduction and discussed in more detail below) and the affiliated Majority World Photo Agency. The question of local perspectives was much discussed by Bangladeshi photographers, particularly those affiliated with Drik, and they were the most willing to discuss and question stereotypes – a willingness most likely a reflection of their training in visual anthropology and representational theories taught at the Pathshala programmes. Therefore, upon their invitation to join the photography festival Chobi Mela in 2009, I began preliminary interviews with photographers although I sensed that while interviewees were open about their work and projects, gaining full access to their working world would be difficult.

Three points of contention quickly arose which reinforced the need to re-evaluate my approach and ways of negotiating access if I was to be able to investigate the processes of photographic production. First, discussions about photographic practice, ways of working and decision-making proved difficult. Since photographers operate in predominantly visual worlds and their professional practice involves action, getting them to reflect on process and ways of working was challenging. (In the beginning stages of the research one of the first photographer interviewees explained to me, “*You’ll soon find out photographers are not talkers, they are doers*”). I sensed many photographers felt the exercise to be not only trivial but several also questioned why I wanted to discuss the obvious. This problem is expressed succinctly by Inglis (2005, pp.2-3):

‘when one is called to reflect upon and describe their everyday existences, not only is the point of doing that probably somewhat obscure...but it is also rather difficult to put into words what one takes for granted. Asking people to reflect upon activities they rarely, if ever, reflect upon can render them unsure as to what to say and how to put into words things that they generally never vocalize’.

It is possible however that the initial resistance to answering my trivial questions may have been a reaction to my relative ignorance of the profession and the lack of technical skills and ‘speak’ of photography.

Second, it was assumed by some photographer interviewees that my objectives and approach to the subject of NGO photographic assignments were guided by a critical perspective. The photographic critique and the suspicions surrounding the photographic process, as detailed in the previous

chapter, had filtered through to the level of practitioners and some were defensive about what they saw as the 'photographer-blame' which exists in the wider discourse.

The third point which I found significant when gaining access to the photographic community, and in interactions with my research contacts, was the issue of how photographers perceived and portrayed themselves. The identities constructed by the photographers contained a certain amount of bravado: they saw themselves as explorers encountering potential dangers and uncertainties on the front line of action. It also seemed that on some occasions there was an element of deliberate concealment of facts, occasional defensiveness and the avoidance of certain questions³². Their identities were constructed on the notion that the camera is an instrument of creativity, in which the personal intuition and vision of the photographer are paramount. Concurrently they highlighted their professional duty as reporters to record the actual situations as they witnessed them. These somewhat contradictory characteristics, of interpreting subjectively while representing objectively, seemed to be a way to construct identities and differentiate themselves as the 'professionals' in contrast to the unprofessional and 'citizen journalist' categories. This may be a strategy to deal with an industry undergoing significant changes with the democratisation of the camera and the associated process of deprofessionalisation of the industry.

These three factors and the apprehension felt by my interviewees because of my perceived lack of expertise and the perception of my critical approach to the practice quickly caused me to re-evaluate my position. If was to gain full access to members of the photographic community, to understand the context of the trade and to be able to relate to its complexities, I needed to become a student of photography and take a more participatory role. I will discuss this in more detail later in this chapter.

There were similar problems in discussing these issues with management level staff of NGO communications departments. Again, there seemed to be an assumption that my research was adopting a critical approach. Although I was aware of the sensitivities in discussions over humanitarian imaging prior to entering the field, it was during the initial interviews that I realised

³² The impervious attitude by some photographers I approached was vocalised poignantly by Duffy, "*I've got very mixed feelings about analysis. The photographer knows sod all about what he is doing – they have no insight, it's drivell when they start talking about it and explaining it.*" (Duffy, 2011)

how important discussions of ethics were and subsequently ethics in photography took on a more central role in my inquiry. Despite some initial reservations, however, the interviewees acknowledged the critique and the inherent tensions in their roles. They generally responded without taking defensive positions to questions about their work and were open to the challenges I posed for them, such as their response to accusations of objectifying the vulnerable populations. This seemed to be a question which was expected and one which they attempted to address through organisational photographic guidelines and picture policies. However when I asked to see these policies I was referred to the public versions and refused the internal versions based on the confidentiality status of the documents or, in the case of a few organisations, was told that they have no formal picture policy per se, but they assured me that the editorial team was guided by ethical principles. Although obliging and helpful, as much as rules of confidentiality allowed, I recognised the importance of following organisational protocol, and an understanding of the potential sensitivity of the information we were discussing. (One Communications Director after a rather frank interview commented *"I hope I didn't say anything I shouldn't have. I guess it doesn't matter since I am retiring soon"*).

Although no explicit claims of ethical photography were made by these professionals about their organisations, this stance was implicitly declared through their guidelines which emphasised the 'positive' and empowering nature of photography which was sourced through consensual means. Examples of this in practice were provided in interviews, such as banning negative images in all communications work, showing me policies which demanded the informed consent of photographic subjects and through picture guidelines. These organisations placed a great emphasis on ethical content and the ethical sourcing of images, which were designed to reinforce their desired representations of their beneficiaries, and to show and celebrate their resilience.

It was the difficulties of gaining access, the reliance on written policies, the occasional defensiveness in these interviews and the negotiation of access to photographic assignments that provided valuable insights into the field of humanitarian communications. In particular it highlighted the general awareness of the academic critique of this form of imaging and the desire of its social actors to abide by ethical practices in sourcing these images. However it also revealed that the notion of 'ethical photography' did not have a universal definition and this lack of precision

seemed to be surrounded by a general insecurity regarding what it meant in practice. This gave me an opportunity to interrogate this question further in my fieldwork.

3.3 *Research Location of Bangladesh*

Bangladesh provided an ideal social environment for an investigation into humanitarian imagery for two reasons. First, the country is home to a diversified NGO sector, both local and international, which maintains a significant role in social development and second, it supports a vibrant photographic movement which has made some headway in challenging the dominant representations of the global South in the international image economy and in utilising photography as tool for social activism.

The NGO sector forms a strong presence in Bangladesh and is vital to the social development efforts in the country (for a detailed history of the NGO sector in Bangladesh see Zohir 2004). This sector has been called one of the most sophisticated national development networks in the world (Devine 2003, p.229). Without exact statistics of the numbers of NGOs working in the country it was estimated in 2004 that there were 22,000 – 24,000 NGOs operating in the country there (Zohir, 2004) of which approximately 1,250 received foreign donorship (Thornton et al., 2000 in Devine 2003). The importance of NGO sponsored services is significant in the fields of education, health, agricultural support and microfinance, with programmes affecting 35 percent of the population (Thornton et al., 2000 in Devine, 2003). The prominence of the NGO sector extends to local NGOs providing services under the remit of social security or implementing programmes funded by international aid agencies. In an overall assessment Ahluwalia and Mahmud (2004) argue that the progress achieved in the last three decades around social development indicators, particularly the expansion of primary education and reduction in foreign aid, have been credited in part to the efforts of NGOs operating in the country.

The gatekeeper organisation in the initial stages of research and one which held much relevance for my research was the Drik organisation which was set up in 1989 as a platform to challenge the dominant imagery of the global South and to promote the work of local photographers. The organisation and its affiliated Asian School of Photography, Pathshala, were motivated by what they saw as the inequality of representations by Western photographers monopolising often

negative depictions of the global South. Pathshala's curriculum heavily emphasises the ideological significance of promoting photographers from the global South, and the training they provide to local photographers includes work on avoiding stereotypes and a discussion of globalisation, visual colonialism and visual anthropology. The organisation has managed to support many younger photographers' entrance into the international image market, encouraging them to maintain certain local sensibilities despite the international "visual grammar" which has a notably Western bias (Clark, 2009). Photography generally remains an important medium of communication in the country and where the majority of the people cannot read or write photography is one of the few means through which the average person can be reached (Alam 2009, p.3).

Although the choice of Bangladesh as a research location was initially guided by the opportunity to participate in a gathering of international photographers during the biennial international festival of photography organised by Drik called Chobi Mela in 2009, I discovered during that visit that the country provided an ideal context for the study of the processes of production of humanitarian imagery. One of the rationales for working in Bangladesh was the vibrant and developing photography scene and the cooperation of members of this community with the NGO sector – with whom they shared the mission of social change facilitated through the medium of photography. The prominence of the NGO sector and the ideological movement among photographers to challenge and provide alternative development photography to the NGO sector meant that issues of representation and the questioning of dominant narratives had a history of debate in Bangladesh. Furthermore collaboration between the photographers and NGOs was well-established combining to make Bangladesh an ideal location for research into humanitarian imaging.

3.4 Methodology and Epistemological Status of Data

This research is based on ethnographic methods which imply that qualitative data collection methods, such as participatory observation of photographers in their natural environments and interviews with social actors involved in the processes of production, were used (alongside reviews of secondary documentation). As the literature review suggested, in regards to photography, questions of truth and realism are central to photographic theory and to questioning its political functions. These concerns are also shared in discussions of ethnography. Post-structuralism and post-modernism have provided challenges for evaluations of truth and falsity,

such as the Foucauldian 'regimes of truth' within which social practices are structured, and have affected ethnographic approaches, bringing into question the positivist epistemology and objectivist ontology that characterised the beginnings of ethnographic inquiry. In this view the social world is understood as operating and comprising of objective facts which are witnessed, recorded and reported by the researcher. However the idea that ethnographic accounts can represent social reality as a straight-forward exercise have now been largely discounted and replaced by the understanding that social meanings are not stable and reflect a shifting constitutive role of language (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.12).

The research is aligned with an interpretivist epistemology and subjectivist ontology. From this perspective the social world is constantly emerging and continuously being interpreted and reinterpreted by its social actors. My research seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their world and what meanings they attach to their experiences – for the focus of this thesis is to uncover how the social actors attach meaning to photographic ethics, how they negotiate through the networks of meanings and how they view their role in the processes of producing ethical photography.

The interpretivist approach views the nature of human interactions as constructed, which also includes the research process, data and findings, however this 'does not automatically imply that they [the findings] do not or cannot represent social phenomena' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.16). Supporting the position that ethnography is capable of obtaining knowledge which has a wider reference, Willis and Trondman argue social phenomenon can only be understood with reference to the mediating ideas and culture within which it occurs which they call 'the ethnographic recording of lived experience within the social' (2000, p.10).

The approach employed in this thesis follows from the research questions presented in Chapter 1 which set out three related areas of inquiry. The first set of questions addresses the conceptual criteria and discursive frameworks around the notion of ethical photography as understood by its producers. The second set of questions is specifically concerned with how these conceptual criteria translate into process and practice. The third set of questions focuses on how the tensions affect the agency of the social actors in the production of humanitarian imagery. The three sets of questions are concerned with interpretation of meaning, processes of production and social constructions in

the field of representation, thereby making ethnographic research methods fitting for this type of inquiry which sees culture as constructed and reconstructed through actors' participation (O'Reilly 2005, p.29).

Ethnographic methods seek to satisfy two conditions, as explained by Lincoln and Guba (1986). The first is the use of close-up detailed observation for an extended period of time by the researcher and second, the attempt to avoid prior commitment to any theoretical model. With the main focus involving examining processes of production and lived experiences, my approach allowed for a way to refrain (as much as possible) from defaulting to interpretations based on the dominant theories of photographic power and the existing classification of images in the polemical positions of positive/negative, dignified/victimising, empowering/objectifying highlighted in the literature review and to a more in-depth understanding of the processes and reasoning based on meanings of social actors.

3.5 Research Design

My general perspective on the photograph is one that views the photographic image as part of the global image economy (Poole, 1997), in which photographs produce their inter-textual nature and gain meaning and significance in relation to other images and text (Hall 1997, p.232). Just as their reception is mediated, producing similar patterns and practices across images, the production processes are also framed within a system of construction which has largely been excluded from wider discussions of dominant regimes of representation and their political functions. It is what Pinney argues when he states scholars of photographic representation have 'lost sight of the dialogic space that frequently emerges during the process of picture *making*'. The concern with the political consequences of photography has effectively erased any engagement with its actual practice' (Pinney 2003, p.14). The return to the level of actual practice has been alluded to frequently, however it has not been discussed as a practical problem. This research aims to address the gap between representation and the subject represented through an ethnographic investigation into the production of this imagery.

The research journey was an iterative process where the focus was refined and reformulated as more information became available. This development of the research focus has been characterised

as a 'funnel structure' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.160) whereby during the research process the methods and research questions progress from a general focus on the production of humanitarian photography and how they are classified, to the more specific inherent tensions involved in the process. The levels of sensitivity, and the numerous layers of vested interests involved, meant that my approach was modified into a more fluid and flexible one, involving active participation in roles assigned and necessitated by the situations I was in; these involved acting as photographic assistant, as photographer or assisting NGO staff in executing projects. The investigation adopted an ethnographic approach most advantageous to study the fast-paced, event-based interactions, in its widely defined form of 'participating, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2004, p.1).

3.5.1 The Data Sets

It was at a relative early stage of the research that two key foci for discussions of ethical images were identified. The first was based around the guidelines and discussions of the ethical content of images and the second was the ethical sourcing of images in the field. The sources for this aspect of my research included the branding strategies and photographic guidelines of six international organisations, in addition to confidential documentation of another three organisations on the topic of the use of photography in communications and guidelines issued to photographers. In addition the selection of secondary sources included a wide range of internal and external documentation and included both publicly accessible and confidential sources. It was informed and corroborated with other sources of data such as NGO communications projects (of images and text), the media coverage of humanitarian crises, reports on ethics produced by organisations, committees and academic bodies, seminars on photographic practice, discussions and interviews with photographers on how they work in private and public forums and branding documentation.

Interviews with photographers and development organisation communications management were used to supplement these sources and the participants were asked to explain how they defined ethics in photography and their roles in the process. The semi-structured interviews were designed

to identify the tensions and the ways in which social actors defined their positions in the process were used to analyse their perspectives on ethics in the humanitarian sphere of imaging generally.

Engaging with practice through the four ethnographic case studies enabled me to observe how access was negotiated between photographer and those they photographed, how photographers operated in the field and the practical problems involved during filming. The focus here was on action and how photographers and their subjects performed social life and the strategies used to achieve the desired aims. Case Study Three in Chapter 5 acts as an auto-ethnographic account of an NGO assignment, where I was the commissioned photographer. The decision to include this as Case Study Three in this research was based on the strength of insight it provides in expanding my analysis from that based on my role as observer to that of a central participant in the production process. Without prior intentions or aspirations to become a photographer, my initial photographic training was not seen as an important element in the research and viewed only as a way to access the photographic community and participate in 'photography speak'. However as the observatory case studies were being carried out, it became clear that the role of photographer was being ascribed to me by the beneficiaries of aid programmes and upon reflection, I felt that the best way to understand the personal challenges on the ground was to become the main photographer on assignment. This position allowed me to experience and record my observations of the negotiations which arose between commissioner, photographic subjects and physical elements and to examine reflexively the restraints, personal expectations and the desires of the client, and to look at how these conditions affect action and the images. Therefore this research simultaneously includes an auto-ethnographic account as one of the key sources of data. As method it provides a way to triangulate the interview and observation data.

3.5.2 Interviewees and Informants

A total of 42 interviews³³ were conducted with the two sets of social agents in the process: the photographers and NGO communications management³⁴ in the period of 2009-2010. The

³³ There are 11 key photographer informants who are quoted in this thesis for which pseudonyms are used. Their names are Akil, Bitan, Chandran, Eknath, Faisal, Shehab and the case study photographers Saikat and Ahmed. In addition, other international photographers who worked on humanitarian assignments and who provided insightful data are Diego, Hugo and Greer. The key informants from the NGO sector comprise of 15 senior communications professionals (see List of Key Informants). For clarity, quotes from these key informants are formatted as indented and in italics, whereas quotations from published materials are indented.

interviews with photographers were generally semi-structured and discussed the work of the photographer in question and were used to provide a context and the opportunity to speak about specific examples and events. Of the photographer interviews, all but two were with professional photographers making a living from the profession while the other two were students aiming to enter the professional sphere.

The semi-structured interview format also suited the context when interviewing NGO communication management who were typically senior communications managers. The interviewees usually held responsibility for commissioning photographers and producing and managing internal and external communications with most having direct experience of photographing and filming in the context of humanitarian issues. This semi-structured interview approach allowed for the interviewees to expand on issues which they viewed important, and allowed me to identify potential issues I had not been aware of previously. In addition, with the sensitivity of the topic I wanted to avoid the interviewee adopting a defensive posture, since my intentions were not to implicate but rather uncover. However many of these managers had professional training and previous careers in journalism and therefore were able to direct the interview strategically when they wished.

In addition to the recorded interviews, there were many private and informal conversations during courses, exhibitions, festivals, all of which I viewed as a productive method of negotiating my access on assignment. They proved an important avenue for gaining information, particularly in the initial stages of research. During the research journey I became a student of photography and my relationships with other students, teachers and hobby photography networks were explored both for my development as photographer and for an understanding of the context of the practice. Also as a former NGO employee, I established contact with erstwhile colleagues and journalist contacts in order to gain a greater understanding of the general contemporary climate and to source referrals into more specialised areas of the organisations dealing with marketing and communications. It was these informal contacts who provided me with confidential documentation and insights into the industry.

³⁴ This thesis does not delineate precisely between interviewees and informants, and is only relevant to acknowledge that many of the photographers and NGO communications management who did not choose to participate in the research did provide documentation, facilitate contacts and assistance for this research in an anonymous capacity.

3.6 On Assignment: Four Photographic Case Studies

The four cases studies based around humanitarian photography assignments comprise the main source of data into the investigation. Yin (2003) argues case studies are well suited to research which focuses on contemporary phenomenon within a real life context and where the researcher has limited control over the events as they occur. There was little freedom in the selection of case studies due to the difficulties faced in negotiating access; however the four case studies forming this thesis are diverse. Collectively they provide insight into the general types of assignments in the NGO sector, in addition to providing opportunity for productive comparisons. The goal of case study inquiry is to contribute to the expansion and generalisation of theories and should not be used for statistical generalisation (Yin 2003, p.10). While it is not possible to draw definite generalisations from the case studies presented, nonetheless the diversity of the case studies does provide a basis for tentative general conclusions about ethical principles with which the producers of humanitarian photography work and the dilemmas that they encounter. Both of the photographers I shadowed were trained in Bangladesh and were working full-time in the profession. Fuller details of each case study are given in Chapter 4 and 5 but warrant a brief outline here.

Case studies One, Two and Three were short one-day assignments which were highly structured and coordinated events. The outputs were generally specifically defined in the commissioner's instructions. With this sort of assignment the creative impulse and vision allowed to the photographer was limited and there was always a danger of them becoming rigid simulation exercises – a problem of which photographers were well aware (Suvendu Chatterjee, 2011, pers. comm., 18 August).

Case Study One and Three were commissioned by the same international educational charity, Reading Room³⁵ which runs several programmes in Bangladesh to promote reading and improve facilities for literacy and support for the education of girls. Case Study One documents one of the schools participating in this programme. Case Study Three was the assignment I was commissioned to undertake which documented the success of one of the beneficiaries participating in the girls'

³⁵ The commissioning organisations for the case studies in this dissertation, Reading Room, Mobile Connect and Christian Assistance Service, are pseudonyms.

education programme. This organisation was a relatively new one, closely managed from their American headquarters, with their funding coming predominantly from private donors. Case Study Two was commissioned by the communications division of a corporation for their corporate social responsibility programme. The company, Mobile Connect (referred to throughout the thesis as MoCon), had originally started as a local NGO, had grown into a quasi-commercial organisation and been transformed into one of the most profitable corporations in Bangladesh. In efforts to remain consistent with its humanitarian beginnings, it actively promoted social development projects in the name of corporate social responsibility and its visual brand image remained one which focused on the 'average' citizen, fitting with the traditions of documentary photography. An advertising agency was contracted to create the communications product and therefore the advertising agency staff were present during the filming.

Case Study Four was a lengthy documentary assignment which consisted of six days of filming for an organisation which I shall refer to as Christian Assistance Service (CAS). It was on this assignment that the commissioners required more detail and wanted a narrative included with the images, which meant that more in-depth research needed to be carried out on the names, and personalities, of the people photographed. Commissioned as a series of human interest stories, this assignment provided the photographer with the freedom to explore different ways of telling stories and to evaluate first-hand the projects and effects of the NGO's activities. CAS was based in the United States and partly funded by USAid with its main sponsorship coming through private donorship funds. With development and humanitarian operations in multiple locations around the world, CAS delegated the management and operation of the specific programmes to a local Bangladeshi implementing charity, while regional managerial functions were carried out in regional offices. The assignment instructions identified the imagery which would be used for various visibility and fundraising projects.

In the thesis I have deliberately chosen to present these four case studies separately in Chapters 5 and 6 in order to highlight the complexities and subtleties of the practice as they occurred on assignment. My original field notes from case study assignments provided me with an extensive collection of notes (and images) and of detailed momentary accounts of the interactions, which I have drawn upon to illustrate particular moments. As the ethnographic accounts of assignments

began to form, I was at first distressed to realise how personal these case studies had become and at my unsuccessful attempts to construct detached accounts of my observations. I recognise therefore that parts of the dissertation are more personal than others, which can be the strength of ethnography once the researcher embraces this role. As Loïc Wacquant argues:

‘It is imperative that the sociologist submit himself to the fire of action *in situ*; that to the greatest extent possible he put his own organism, sensibility, and incarnate intelligence at the epicentre of the array of material and symbolic forces that he intends to dissect.’ (Wacquant 2004, p.viii)

This process has been very much a personal story of navigating the complexities of human impulse and rationality in photographic practice in the context of humanitarian imaging, and offers a reflection on the gap which exists in the literature between representations and practice, and the inherent problem of merging the two.

3.6.1 Negotiating Access to the Field

My initial access to the Bangladeshi photographic community was through the Majority World Photo Agency affiliated with Drik. This provided contact with professional photographers and an understanding of their industry and work. Interviews were generally granted and most photographers enjoyed speaking about their own work and projects. Interviews with NGO communications managers were also usually without complication and people made time even though they were unwilling to allow me to join in on assignments. Many reasons were given for this; such as it was against organisational policy because my safety could not be assured and this was a responsibility they were unwilling to accept. Access to image databases was also generally declined, with only UNICEF Bangladesh allowing supervised access.

Obtaining permission through photographers to shadow photographic assignments was also complex. Most photographers I interviewed thought it was an interesting proposal theoretically, but was practically inconvenient, and so, declined politely. I detected they felt I would intrude on their professional space and become a hindrance. (One photographer declined directly: “*That is ridiculous, how would you like it if I sat next to you all day while you worked on your laptop?*”) In the later stages of the research it became clear that their hesitance also stemmed from the difficult position it would place them if the NGO commissioner objected or found out about my presence.

My first breakthrough for the lengthy documentary assignment occurred during a research interview with Ahmed³⁶, a professional documentary photographer, who I with negotiated for access to the six-day charity commissioned assignment (Case Study Four). Ahmed clearly set out the terms and conditions of my role:

"If you want to shadow me, I would want to know what's in it for me. You're taking my time...so it is simply about being professional. What I do is – I take trainees who work here for NGOs and I charge them for my time. When I am taking someone, I try to let them know the culture and how to get into the culture and how to come out, being friends and not just looking down on them. So if you come along, I expect you to do the same...there should be an incentive for my time." (Ahmed)

For access on this assignment a daily fee was agreed upon, with the understanding that Ahmed would confirm my participation with the NGO for the assignment and I would not contact them directly. On route to location it transpired that my participation had been negotiated as the photographer's assistant and not as a researcher. In addition it was also made clear that he would not be providing any of his photographs or text for my use, however I was free to document for my own research purposes. As part of our contract I was not to contact the organisation's communications team for interviews or to inquire about this assignment and the commissioning NGO should be kept confidential. Participation in Case Study Two (in Chapter Four) was also offered by Ahmed under the same conditions of payment and terms of confidentiality.

For Case Study One, a photographer contact negotiated my participation which led to an invitation from a Reading Room's Country Director to join the one-day assignment. The condition for participation was access to all information I requested except the use of the final images. The Country Director however did state he would not object if the photographer shared the images for this research. The images used in Case Study One are therefore used with the full consent of the photographer and the indirect permission of the charity. Case Study Three eventuated on my final visit to Bangladesh in 2010, a year after Case Study One, when the Country Director continued his support of my research and assigned a photographic commission to me during my stay. I accepted on the exchange principle: my images in return for research access.

³⁶ Ahmed is a pseudonym.

3.6.2 The Research Sites

The research sites were in various locations and during a typical assignment, the pace would be fast and the opportunities to gain knowledge about the people in the images limited. The main gatekeepers were the commissioners, employees of the NGO or the advertising design team who provided background information specific to the project/story. The limitations of time and the deadline pressure to acquire the images and data required was a constant factor to consider. The shooting locations were centred on 'events' and not set geographic locations, therefore it was often the case that the photographer or commissioners did not have any details about the people or locations other than a beneficiary's name, if that. Negotiations centred on location, for places to photograph, such as home, school or at the market square. Without fixed locations the only consistent variable in these cases was the photographer or the charity staff on whom I was dependent for logistics, schedules and information. Independent background research was not possible.

3.7 Positionality

By the term positionality I refer to the roles I adopted and how I was viewed by participants during the process of data collection in the field. The development of this informs much of the data I am presenting in this thesis and highlights the evolving nature of fieldwork.

3.7.1 With Photographers

The initial hesitance of the photographers towards my lines of inquiry, as described in the initial stages of my research journey, eventually gave way to open and frank interviews. When the purpose of my research was understood as being more of a study on the 'photographic habitus' rather than on potential criticisms of their practice, relationships of trust developed. The building of these relationships occurred over the three-year research period and was cemented by my annual visits to Bangladesh. This was evidenced by the invitations to join book launches and exhibitions, participate in photographic workshops, and the sharing of confidential documentation which informants felt would assist me in my research.

In the field my position with the photographers was as part of a working relationship, as assistant and/or as student, in which I tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible and which did not seem to

affect the work of the photographers. Indeed one photographer said my presence made shooting easier as I provided a distraction for the crowds, thereby allowing him to fulfil his assignment without the interruptions normally encountered. When expressing this concern to Ahmed, the photographer in Case Studies 2 and 4, he shrugged off my worry saying “*no, the only time you will is if you are in front of my lens*”. As trust and experience with each other developed it became easier to predict movement and an intuitive understanding and similar vision of situations developed between us.

3.7.2 With community and subjects

During assignment, the most significant marker of my difference was the fact that I was foreign and therefore assumed to be either the donor for the charity, a tourist or a foreign journalist. Carrying expensive camera equipment was a sign of my material wealth and confirmed the above characteristics. A senior photographer and curator explained the general distinction held in South Asia: “*As a generalisation, to the wider public if you have a big camera it means ‘professional’, and you have the intention of selling the pictures in which case they may object or ask for money to compensate. If you have a small camera, you are an ‘amateur’ or a ‘tourist’ so there will be fewer objections*” (Suvendu Chatterjee, 2011, pers. comm., 18 August). As our task was understood to be a part of the charity operations, money was not requested. Only in two cases did people approach me to request money and they were not NGO beneficiaries. They came to me with direct requests, exhibited their medical problems and told me their hardships but this only occurred when the photographer and NGO staff were out of sight. They immediately dispersed when NGO staff were present. When I declined there were no altercations.

3.7.3 As Researcher and Photographer

During the research process my own role as a photographer started to become central to my research and the distinctions of the role of photographer and PhD student became increasingly blurry. Many of the tensions I will describe in this thesis are on reflexive levels which were caused largely because of the contradictions I felt in both these roles. As I entered the field I was the one donning a Nikon D80 and therefore in the eyes of the communities, the photographer. The activity of photographing also came naturally in long periods of waiting and the opportunity also to become

a photographic trainee, guided by experts, was very appealing. The camera became a tool of intentional detachment in situations where people would approach and if I wanted to remain aloof and fulfil my research task of observation, I would remove the lens cap and occasionally look through the lens. This was a clue that people understood and respected my space as I was working.

The research commenced with my intention to be an unobtrusive observer during the photographic assignments. However as the work progressed, the naivety of this approach was revealed and, I felt there were multiple roles placed upon me. My position evolved from being an observer, to an observer participant, until my own commissioned assignment led to full participant with the double consciousness of observing myself and my judgements in the field. My data are a mix of observations of the photographic processes I observed and the lessons learnt and reflections on the multiple roles I assumed, as academic researcher, photography trainee and photographer's assistant.

3.8 *Language*

Six months prior to departing for Bangladesh I undertook Bengali courses. I continued to learn informally by living with a Bangladeshi family and through everyday interactions; however my comprehension skills were more advanced than spoken skills. Much of the field data in the research was interpreted by photographers and some by the charity staff when they were present. Although their task was not to provide interpretation services, they were obliging. In situations where I was not exactly clear on meaning, I asked for immediate interpretation and in other cases where immediate translation was not possible, I followed up later after the shoot. This was reciprocal because I also recorded case study details for the photographer. I recognise that during assignment some of the events the photographers did not feel would be important to me may not have been interpreted. However with the close collaboration which developed during the assignment, this may have occurred in relatively few instances.

All interviews and communication with the photographers was conducted in English. For ease of understanding and clarity, I have edited some of the interview quotes to Standard English. I have sought to ensure the precise meanings are not altered and I am confident the transcriptions reflect the intentions in the contexts they arose, even though they may not be word for word translations.

3.9 Analysis of Data

Thematic analysis or qualitative content analysis involves close scrutiny of texts, which included academic texts, NGO communications and secondary data that was found during the process, and was an iterative process during the research journey. This type of analysis ascertained the mediating ideas and culture within which the practices and processes of production occur and are understood. This was a constructive process to identify the three emic categories, i.e. the conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity that comprise the main conceptual framework for the data.

The first level of field data analysis occurred during the processing of field notes on my return from the field and the identification of themes, patterns and variations within each individual case study and comparatively across cases were made possible. This was done through an open coding system to identify the dominant themes and issues and how they were performed and negotiated in practice. The main issues arising from field notes were the topics of consent, access and self-disclosure. From the reading of the field documentation it became apparent that many of the negotiations and tensions had conceptual consistency with the three important criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity, as they were also identified in the secondary data in the thematic analysis. Although these three terms were not collectively and explicitly referred to in any of the data sources, they were conceptually consistent across the sets of data. The terminology differed depending on the social actors involved, for example in photography circles the terminology used was 'actual', 'connection' and 'respect' whereas in the NGO interviews and documentation, the terms used were 'human rights', 'protection' and 'togetherness/solidarity' to explain and justify their work, they seemed to be related to these three key concepts. These three notions became the initial 'sensitizing concepts' (Blumer, 1954) which were identified in the data and set the direction for further inquiry. They eventually became reinforced as the data expanded and these concepts became the core ethical criteria highlighted in the field data. Comprehension is thought to be sufficiently thorough when the researcher can describe the events, incidents and exceptions from an emic perspective (Morse 1994, p. 37).

Photography judges as ethical by the participants seemed to be fluid and negotiable depending on the context, situation and person involved, however the three themes were shared concepts which

were utilised to explain the evaluations and judgements. Therefore they have been adopted to provide an analytical lens through which I approach and move across all the different sources of data sets and they allow for a consistent framework to compare and build the core discussion around the issue of ethical photography.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Prior to departure to the field research ethical clearance from the Open University's Ethics Committee was granted. Photographers of social documentary generally face similar ethical concerns to ethnographers over issues of access, consent and accurate description, and it is these concerns which form the findings and discussion points central to the thesis. The discussion of findings in Chapter 8 provides detailed commentary on the issues of ethics and ethical practice in humanitarian photography and how they relate to the execution of this research project.

However, one of the main ethical considerations encountered in this research is the issue of confidentiality and protection of identity of my informants. As my affiliation with photographer circles expanded, the levels of trust and understanding for the nature of my research increased. My photographer connections expanded into many photographic networks and many of them provided me with confidential documentation and correspondence from the NGO assignments they had worked on. Some insisted I see these documents to give me a better understanding of the context and constraints in which they work. The sensitivity of this information was highlighted and was shared only on condition of strict confidentiality of both the source and of the organisations in which the documents originated. These documents held details of communications strategies such as branding strategies, work-in-process documents to build a visual brand, photographic demands and some included payment and cost details. I was keenly aware of their sensitivity and the possibility of damaging the relationship, and the threats to future cooperation and assignments, between photographer and NGO if they were revealed.

It is due to these concerns of confidentiality that most of the names in the dissertation, in quotes and field notes, are pseudonyms. In all cases it was not a request contingent on the individual's participation, however with the provision of confidential documents, the frank nature of some comments on the industry and colleagues, I view it as necessary. The community is tight and

competitive and I do not wish to bring conflict or awkward situations for my informants as a result of my research.

3.10.1 Use of Photographs

The rationale for the inclusion of photographs in the case study chapters has been weighed in view of Emmison's warning on the over-use of visual images in research: 'Photographs may be helpful sometimes in recording the seen dimensions of social life. Usually they are not necessary' (2004 p. 250). As this research is not a project using photography as a visual method but rather an ethnographic research into the production of the photograph, the images I use in the thesis are not intended to make any claims about the people in them or to bear witness to anything other than a visual record of the process of photographing as it occurred on the assignments I was involved in. They are meant fulfil a similar purpose as Bourdieu's photographic fieldwork in Algeria that has been described as 'a sensuous form of knowledge' (Puwar 2009, p. 378). They are intended as a supplement to ethnographic notes and to give clues as to the types of photographs which were being commissioned – many are similar to the ones taken by the professional photographer with slight differences in perspective since I typically shot from behind the photographer. Most of the photographs are the author's own since permission was not granted to use the commissioned photographs (with the exception of Case Study One). These have been acknowledged accordingly.

Chapter 4

Defining Image Ethics: Organisational Regulation, Identity and Practice

4.1 Introduction

This research takes the position that images are a significant element in the politics of development, and humanitarian organisations make conscious efforts to challenge stereotypes through the imagery they use, in response to criticism that they have, in the past, promulgated Orientalist discourses which exacerbate difference. To minimise potential negative responses from audiences, marketised ethical discourses (Verstergaard, 2008) have been coded in the form of branding strategies, which simultaneously aim to divert critique and support organisational identities as rights-based organisations.

Although the documentation, in the form of strategies outlining guidelines and protocol, do not strictly determine or define how they are interpreted in practice, they indicate the desired aims of how organisations wish to operate, and to be seen as operating. The presentation incorporates the sensitizing concepts of authenticity, solidarity and dignity, and these criteria guide assessments and inform practice. This chapter discusses the defining characteristics of how ethical images are understood by the social actors at the level of communications management in humanitarian organisations. The conceptual and practical tensions induced by attempts to operationalise them form a major topic of this chapter.

This chapter begins with the role of the photograph in the work of communications management and how they approach the medium as they discuss its opportunities and limitations. It then progresses onto the issue of branding and how, in regulatory documents, the criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity are reflected, and how they occasionally conflict with the needs of communications management. The branding strategies and image guidelines of six of the larger international NGOs, who have made their branding and image guidelines public, are reviewed.

They include Christian Aid, Action Aid, Oxfam, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services and UNICEF. In addition to the public materials, the analysis in this chapter includes confidential documentation from photographers and interviews conducted with NGO communications management. This thematic analysis is not a comprehensive analysis of content, which the relatively small sample does not allow for, however it allows insight into the context of production of humanitarian photography, the regulations guiding practice and shows how academic and audience critique has filtered and combined with branding strategies. Finally, the convergences and tensions between media and NGOs will be discussed and the chapter will discuss the ways in which the tensions and convergences between these two groups emerge in practice.

This chapter refers to numerous sources of data such as interview material with communications management of NGOs, regulatory documents and guidelines and academic literature. For clarity, all interview material which has been collected for this study is presented in italics and all other secondary literature, including interview material which has previously been published by other authors, is indicated by single quotation marks.

4.2 The Photographic Medium: Opportunity and Limitation

The photograph retains a central position in communications literature as a straightforward, cost efficient method to communicate internally and externally with stakeholders from various linguistic groups. As a method of mediation between the unfortunate Others and the fortunate viewers (Boltanski, 1999) photography also functions as a way of uniting publications and documentation output in NGO communications.

"Still [imaging] has an essential role in all we do. Our publications are all available online and usually on any issue, e.g. if you take State of the World's Children or the trafficking campaign on the website, there is a story with photographs attached to it. The photo essay, news video and report itself all interlinks and intertwines to support each other... It supports video and everything else we do online and our hard copy life. All the of the advocacy and fundraising efforts, at country and global level all rely heavily on the image." (Communication Specialist, UNICEF)

The photograph retains its importance even in the sphere of new technologies. Its appeal lies in its immediacy and its ability to describe events in the most direct and uncomplicated manner.

"I can say there was a flood or I can show you a picture – you instantly understand the scope and the issue." (Regional Director, World Vision)

This immediacy is supplemented by photography's ability to communicate across global organisations with the entire cross-section of international stakeholders.

"Photographs have always been important and integral part of communications on the part of international organisations and are the simplest way to make people understand beyond language barriers why we are doing this." (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

The technology required for photographs is both cost-effective and easily transmittable from remote locations, particularly in destinations affected by crises. It requires less equipment and editing hours than video or multimedia reports for production. In emergency situations photographs are the first forms of communication to be distributed through media channels and remain central to first response missions.

Humanitarian imagery supporting the work of NGOs can generally be characterised as simple, direct and emotive with subjects in the frame communicating directly with viewers and combines two consistent components: people and activity. Not only is the presence of one or more people essential, *"a photograph without a person is useless to me"* (Regional Director, World Vision), but there is also a demand for the inclusion of some form of activity being carried out when the purpose of communications is to show the effectiveness of the organisational programmes.

"When I go take pictures of projects I make sure there is physical activity being carried out. For example, it makes no sense if we finish constructing 30 latrines, which is very important health and hygiene issue, but am I going to take a picture of 30 latrines? It would be great for a project file that we have finished the projects and funds have been spent, but from a PR point of view absolutely zero...there has got to be people doing things." (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

This explanation also highlights the issue of selectivity of the camera and the need for activity may explain in part the why, *"Emergencies are great for PR"* (Communications Consultant, UNDP). However the preference for images of people involved in some physical activity excludes numerous types of development and humanitarian activities which do not provide the physical 'action' that is desired, such as training programmes in classrooms, institutional reform or the

digging of pit latrines as mentioned above. Their value in these types of images is slim: they simply make for dull photographs.

Images can also be applied to multiple contexts and various narratives, as required by communicators. Narratives are constructed and meaning anchored in the text in the form of captioning which provides communicators with the flexibility to transfer various narratives and messages to a single photograph. The lack of fixed meanings and interpretations provides a recyclable and versatile tool in the communications repertoire.

"Photography lends itself to that – the same picture that I am using to indicate assistance has been provided, someone else could use it to say – this shows the grinding poverty caused by a despotic regime for example, so you can use it either way." (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

One of the formats adopted by many NGOs is the 'human interest story' format. In this format the focus is on a few particular people and its functions are to 'document the experiences of individuals who are affected by those projects. Such stories personalize the successes and challenges and emphasize the human aspect of a PVO's [Private Voluntary Organisation] work' (De Ruiter et al., 2008, p.2). This is an opportunity to showcase beneficiaries in a way which contextualises their experiences and provides information to make their stories not only engaging but also act as a forum to showcase the benefits of donor support³⁷. Whether this is a reaction to audience demands and shifting preferences is unclear but nevertheless the importance of human-interest stories in the case study format is central to humanitarian organisations and generally recognised.

"All development agencies need case studies, because they want to show the impact of their programmes and how their programmes have changed the lives of their beneficiaries or target groups. They need a particular case to show how life has changed for the individual and focus on a particular person makes it easier to relate to." (Head of External Relations, WFP)

Case studies or human-interest stories have become a core format of reporting, and are used across programme evaluations and fundraising campaigns. This provides a more flexible design to allow

³⁷ This preference was also documented in the report from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the Institute for Public Policy Research which found that audiences prefer more complex stories on how developing countries achieve progress and how aid works. Audiences expressed distaste for images depicting only desperate need. The report states that audiences are 'interested in hearing about how aid works (and why it doesn't always work) and being given stories rather than statistics to illustrate how change happens in developing countries' (Glennie et al., 2012, p.24).

for series of images which make possible the expanded narratives and extended proof that programmes and interventions have positive outcomes³⁸. The human-interest format is aimed to recount more balanced and contextualised narratives of beneficiary experiences, which may include negative imagery but can be contrasted with more positive imagery. The shift from single portrait images to formats which require multiple pictures is a noticeable trend according to the Image Editor at UNICEF Bangladesh (Salma Siddique, 2010, pers. comm., 24 February). The commissioned assignments in Case Studies Three and Four are examples of this type of communications format. With photography's central role in all communications activities, the next section explores attempts to adhere to and regulate the ethical concepts of authenticity, solidarity and dignity in practice.

4.3 Branding Authenticity, Solidarity and Dignity

The contemporary organisational environment is witnessing the merging of the commercial and non-commercial organisations, according to Vestergaard (2008) who argues that where practices of commercial organisations are becoming increasingly ethicalised and practices of non-profit organisations are becoming more commercialised. The main industry term to capture the main communications function was 'visibility' and it was broadly separated into three main functions: documentation, fund-raising and advocacy/education projects. These were loosely defined categories and, in practice, had considerable overlap between them. The most commonly identified function of communications work was to 'document our activities', which involved either reporting on the progress of on-going projects or documenting the success of completed ones. Various types of formats were adopted depending on the four key publics to which communications strategy was targeted: beneficiaries, donors, volunteers and governments (Ritchie and Swami 1998, p.29). The provision of proof of the project's success exemplified the growing demands for accountability and efficiency in organisational performance. As Vestergaard argues, there is a need for organisations

³⁸ One such format successfully developed by UNICEF is the photo-essay format which showcases the daily lives and struggles of beneficiaries through a series of photographs and captions. This is found on their website and in the more recent platform where UNICEF's photography archive is made accessible as a downloadable application on mobile devices. UNICEF's app was launched in July 2011 with the Senior Photography Editor's statement: "We hope this is just the beginning of many more steps that reach out, utilizing photography's wonderful visual power, to promote a more multi-faceted and dignified view of children everywhere. And it is thanks to the talented and dedicated professional photographers with whom we work that these stories are as enriching as, we hope, viewers will find them." (Tolmie in UNICEF, 2011)

'to account for their *raison d'être* and performance [which] is becoming ever more vital in attracting and retaining support' (Vestergaard 2010, p.169).

In the domain of fundraising, the types of methods used are determined by the types of support required. The emergency appeals communicate the urgency of the situations through often emotive imagery. In contrast appeals for longer term support, such as child sponsorship campaigns, are used to inspire people to commit to longer term funding relationships.

The third function of communications for visibility was found among the beneficiary populations, in the form of education and advocacy projects. These projects addressed social problems or prevention campaigns and were designed either to change perceptions and/or the behaviour of the beneficiary groups. The examples provided during the research were breastfeeding campaigns, and health and hygiene messaging for the prevention of avian flu in rural areas. Communications of this sort also provides brand awareness and builds trust among the beneficiary populations, often a communications function not addressed in academic commentary.

Communications professionals are increasingly adopting more commercial strategies to communicate and increasingly rely on the media to maximise exposure. The commercial strategies which promote 'visibility' operate across numerous mediums, with stylised reporting and advanced methods of distribution. Yet adopting methods and principles used in business in the humanitarian aid industry creates tensions and frictions, particularly between commercial strategies which depend on the media and increasing public scepticism towards the mediated morality they see in humanitarian branding (Cohen and Seu, 2002; Vestergaard, 2008). The danger remains that audiences may react negatively to communications which are seen as 'too commercial' and run counter to humanitarian principles.

"There is always a tension with an organisation such as ours. If we look too professional then the donors will think we are using our money to produce professional publications. If we look boring, then people won't read it or take up the opportunities." (Communications Manager, World Vision)

These commercially based strategies to maximise visibility and consistency in messaging are engrained in branding strategies (also referred to as branding identity guidelines³⁹) which set out the key frameworks for transmitting values⁴⁰ that organisations desire to be communicated to their key audiences. Organisational branding increases identification and trust among the public, as well as distinguishing the organisation from the 'competition' (Ritchie and Swami 1998, p. 30). However it also serves as an important promoter of values and a tool of public relations. As Hankinson argues:

'Increasingly, charity brand status is being used to communicate meaning through a unique set of values or associations that define the charity not only in terms of what it does (its cause) but more importantly in terms of the values it represents' (quoted, in Vestergaard 2010, p.170).

Herein lies one of the main tensions: the need to communicate the values of humanitarianism through the core conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity, at the same time as differentiating themselves from their competitors. Images must communicate the values in ways which do not manipulate audiences (or are not seen as doing so). They must mediate solidarity between the beneficiaries and viewing audiences through an 'ideal' distance and through representations that do not infringe on audience levels of tolerance or subject dignity. The next sections explore the regulatory context which aims to produce and protect these values.

4.3.1 Promoting Authenticity

The majority of photographs used in the NGO sector belong to the genre of social documentary and the importance of accurate reporting remains a core concept in this tradition. The claims of accuracy and the assumptions of neutrality surrounding this genre of photography support organisational strategies to develop trust with its stakeholders. In contrast, appropriating a more commercial style, of highly stylised and polished imaging, while having greater impact, may have repercussions from the audience and attract accusations of manipulation.

³⁹ The guidelines include imagery and also outline the formal, objective elements which are fixed, such as logotype, colours, strap-line positioning and typefaces designed to reflect the values the organisation wishes to promote.

⁴⁰ UNICEF brand Tool kit defines the style based upon characteristics which are simple, optimistic, bold and contemporary (UNICEF, 2008). World Vision branding is aimed to symbolise hope (World Vision, 2007). ActionAid brand guidelines present the key values of mutual respect, equity, transparency, solidarity, independence, courage of conviction and humility. These values reflect the desired organisational identity of 'togetherness' (ActionAid, 2007).

The notion of capturing real situations as they occur in the lives of the beneficiaries is a central concern of commissioners. People involved in forms of physical activity were seen to convey the most effective and interesting messages, and policies encourage filming such shots as they happened rather than staging or reconstructing situations which had occurred previously. In the branding guidelines, although there are no claims made that the photography is depicting objective realities in the field, the aspiration is there for images which appear as truthful and reality-based. These reality-based accounts are highly guided however to suit particular narratives for intended outcomes. The guidance can take many forms, both written and verbal, although it generally includes an explanation of the guiding philosophy of the organisation, the general aims of the project and the types of photographs needed. In Chapter 7 the 'silent guidelines' i.e. the commonly understood conventions that need not be explicitly detailed but which inform practice are explored. The staging of events and scenes, in the social documentary, reporting and NGO sector, is generally not promoted but it is also not entirely discouraged. Some guidelines advise on how to best capture authentic situations and encourage activity:

'Pick locations or moment in the day when social interactions are more likely to occur or supply props that stimulate social interactions' (Action Aid, 2007)

These sorts of preferences about the types of subjects are not necessarily in conflict with ideals of authenticity but do display a high level of selectivity.

4.3.2 Manipulation: Credibility versus impact

The allowance and tolerance for the digital manipulation of images varies across the organisations' literature and raises issues about the protection of organisational reputations as well as the protection of photographic subjects. Misleading and inaccurate messages, which digital manipulation can produce, are to be avoided but some allowances for minor manipulation are made (Action Aid, 2007; World Vision, 2007; UNICEF, 2009). The levels of manipulation which are condoned are based on a discussion of balancing the loss of credibility to the organisation if the photos are seen to be altered significantly with the gain in the impact of images on audiences. The extent to which minor manipulation is acceptable and the cases where this is allowed is organisation-specific. In the case of UNICEF manipulation techniques are prohibited because:

'All highly subjective judgements aimed at making the image more 'effective'... have ethical and legal implications that also affect UNICEF's credibility.' (UNICEF, 2009)

Most types of photo-manipulation are seen to compromise organisational policy which strives to 'represent children as they actually are in countries and cultures around the world; ensuring that UNICEF's reputation as a source of reliable, factual information is maintained.' (UNICEF, 2009)

Some guidelines are explicit about what levels of manipulation are acceptable:

'Digitally removing dirt from a child's face or highlighting the eyes and teeth of children falsely sanitises their reality, applying current mass marketing standards and values (in richer countries) to conditions of life that are completely different from idealised market conditions.' (UNICEF, 2009)

Others specify the type of photograph which will give the greatest impact: 'As far as possible, use colour images. For more hard-hitting campaigns, black and white images and different graphic treatments (such as the use of dots) can be used to provide more impact' (ActionAid, 2007)

The deletion or addition of content in the photograph would be seen as highly stylised and commercial, but the superimposing of a grainy finish to add the urgency of the message is common practice. A distinctive visual strategy for impact is found in World Vision guidelines which encourage the use of 'cut-outs' of individuals from the background with the arguments that: 'more impact is achieved by dropping out the background' (2007). This visual technique is unique to the visual branding of World Vision.

In addition, the alteration of images links to the issue of identity protection which is an important ethical consideration for organisations working with vulnerable populations. Some forms of photo-manipulation for the purpose of protecting identities, such as the blurring out of faces and placing a black bar across the eyes, are disliked as they are seen as a way of criminalising the subject. Other techniques are suggested as an alternative, such as silhouette shots, body parts i.e. an image of two hands being held together or a long shot with an adult's arm over the child's shoulder in a protective stance.

'To protect the identity of sexually abused persons, publishing conventions include images in profile, or darkened, from the back, or obscure part of the face. Photos should not be manipulated except to protect the identity and privacy of the subject.' (UNICEF, Confidential Document on Standards)

Although manipulation of images is often condemned, under these conditions the manipulation of images is viewed as enhancing the credibility of the organisation and reflecting its values and mission of protecting vulnerable individuals.

4.3.3 Challenge to Stereotypes

Images of children, as the literature review suggested, are a preferred way to promote solidarity-based communications particularly with ‘innocence-based solidarity’ (Slim 1997, p. 350) which is facilitated only with those perceived as innocent and vulnerable. The child is the most powerful symbol of communicating need and direct action by audiences: their perceived vulnerability is their power.

The impact images of children produce in viewing audiences was recognised directly in the interviews as the most powerful way to attract the attention and build the solidarity, between the fortunate and the unfortunate.

“The child is the most powerful symbol, because children are deemed to be helpless, they are most vulnerable and often the most resilient. Parents associate, can identify with the issue and it is natural to feel upset by a suffering child. ” (Regional Communications Director , World Vision);

“children are very powerful – not only because of the fact that they are very photogenic and also the reaction they elicit from the target audience.” (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

The notion of childhood innocence forms its power, particularly to take away from the political element of development and crisis the child symbol is apolitical and nonthreatening (Malkki, 1996; Raatikainen, 2000; Rosler, 2000). Trying to capture this innocence in the pictures was important for many communications managers:

“A specific type of image resonates in every culture. In this picture of the boys laughing in the rain, it doesn’t matter where you are from, this is going to make you happy. You will see an innocence and an enthusiasm for life that we as adults may have lost.” (Communications Manager, UNICEF)

“innocence of kids speaks volumes, and they are accessible.” (Senior Advisor, OCHA)

Children in images suggest a public relations success – they are both engaging and provide ‘safe’ content. Additional benefits also mentioned were the practicalities of filming with children as they are most photogenic and highly accessible. This idea will be reconsidered in Chapter 7.

However there is a tension in the use of such images. Acknowledging two decades of academic critique of the role played by international organisations in perpetuating stereotypes of the global South, many of the NGO policies attempt to dispel these stereotypes through their use of photography. Some branding strategies take on active roles in challenging the images of victimhood associated with women and children and outline the need to reform the stereotypes of beneficiaries. However there is still an emphasis on using child and female subjects and as the Action Aid branding guidelines state:

‘Where possible, use a photograph of a woman rather than a man.’ (Action Aid, 2007).

Although used for different purposes, the continual emphasis on child and female subjects corroborates the symbolic value of such images and requests for children and women were common across all branding documents, even in those not solely focusing of child issues. Despite the intention to challenge stereotypes, this selection of subjects to be portrayed can be seen as encouraging the continuation of colonial discourses of feminised and infantilised communities of the global South.

Other regulations also address *how* to depict subjects and attempt to challenge the stereotypes of childhood and victimhood by replacing them with suggestions of agency and individuality.

‘Ideally, photographs should reflect the concepts of children as individuals, as our equals, and as agents of change.’ (World Vision, 2007)

The Action Aid guidelines provide the most extensive directives on the representation of women in the documentation reviewed. These guidelines aim to enforce portrayals of women in empowered positions and not reflect the more traditional familial roles of women, ostensibly encountered in rural areas in their countries of operation. The branding guidelines state:

‘In most cases, and where appropriate, show women as empowered and in positions of power. Avoid always presenting women as powerless...Where relevant, show women in professional positions (not just as dependants, carers etc). Make sure that while

women can be portrayed as ‘victims’, they should also be portrayed as active agents, taking responsibility for themselves.

For photo captions: Avoid defining women through their marital or maternal roles. Women are individuals first and foremost – wives or mothers second etc.’ (Action Aid, 2007)

Dispelling the victimising stereotypes of powerlessness and instituting more balanced and alternative readings of beneficiary populations may, however, contradict notions of authentic reporting if defined literally. In the case of Bangladesh, and in many of the communities in the global South, the primary identification of women *is* their role as mother and wife. Without disputing the centrality of the role of women and their resilience in adversity, women and children in the rural communities in Bangladesh are under the male guardianship system (Ahmed, 1987) making unmarried women and widows particularly vulnerable. To suggest otherwise or to show images which reflect Western notions of childhood and sexual equality may contradict the accuracy and realism that photography aims to produce. The inference from this guideline suggests a logic which is more concerned about the promotion of a reputation of the organisation and as active force in challenging stereotypes than commitment to accuracy in reporting.

The guidelines reveal preferences for idealised and sanitised images which equate with subject dignity and suit the image of the organisation as being based on humanitarian values. In interviews with UNICEF management the organisational requirements was for all images of children to be fully dressed and by definition this consisted of children wearing shoes, and, if in educational contexts, they had to be wearing school uniforms. Yet in the regions I visited in Bangladesh during the course of the research, children did not wear school uniforms and most did not wear shoes, whether out of preference or inability to afford them. These examples again hint at constructions of the child as being more a reflection of the sensibilities of the viewing audiences in the West, and idealised narratives of organisational success, rather as a realistic or accurate portrayal of the situation.

4.3.4 Text and Authenticity

The use of captioning and text anchors the meanings of the image at the same time as it offers flexibility to alter meanings for multiple contexts. The branding guidelines provide protocol and

guidelines for the sourcing and selection of images, however the textual components were largely absent from these guidelines. There are now strict protocols acknowledging copyright of photographs but the content of the captions is less clearly outlined and enforced despite their power to alter meaning.

'Simple photographs, sometimes, have impact. But with a concise caption, it makes the photograph even more interesting. For example, when you have a woman working in a field, and you just put the caption 'a widow' even if we don't know if that woman is a widow, her status, or if she has had three meals. Or if you put: 'widow had one meal today trying to get something from the ground' - now you know and you can relate. We are now asking photographers to add captions to their work and this has started giving us results.' (Head of External Relations, WFP)

This puts the question of authenticity in reporting into question. Even though the image may be guided by ethical standards, appropriate in content, not manipulated and sourced through informed consent procedures, the associated text may make inferences about the subjects in the photograph which may undermine this. The creation of taglines which are used in direct fundraising appeals are absent from the branding guidelines even though they attach labels to the people portrayed which might suggest the pathetic subjectivity of victimhood.

Numerous examples distributed during 2010-2011 highlight this point of text demeaning authenticity and dignity. In the example of an Oxfam fundraising campaign for Pakistani flood victims the leaflet shows a woman in distress with two young boys as they move through the flooded landscape. The image is cropped across her forehead, emphasising her despair and with a grainy finish. The distinctive Oxfam green banner reads "Next time they could go under".

In another UNICEF direct mail campaign shows a young South Asian girl wearing a sarong with damp hair looking to the side of the camera. The background is blurred and a prominent UNICEF logo is displayed with the attached text "Promise me I won't be sold for sex". These captioning and straplines lead audiences into narratives which can be seen to undermine their realities and identities, compromising the principles of authenticity.

The multimodal techniques of combining images and text, contribute to 'mixed messaging' (Dogra, 2006) as exemplified in the in the sample campaigns above, of positive imagery and negative taglines (and vice versa), that makes the distinctions between positive and negative largely

unproductive categorisations for analysis. However, this polemical categorisation of images remains a tool to discuss imagery. The disjoint between text and image and how to capture accurate meanings and express nuances across mediums hints at major tensions in attempts to regulate ethical imagery more precisely.

4.3.5 Constructing Solidarity

How to bridge the geographical and cultural distance between the funder and the beneficiary is one of the central themes running through the history of humanitarianism. This politics of solidarity is apparent in the branding strategies that emphasise that messages should focus on bringing the audiences closer to the beneficiaries, eliminating their differences and emphasising the similarities between the two. From a branding perspective, however, the notion of building solidarity is selective and does not include their competitors or other organisations working under similar humanitarian principles. Although cooperation between NGOs regularly occurs, the aim for solidarity in the communications field is limited to the relationship between the beneficiaries and potential donors.

The politics of solidarity underlies the mission statements and philosophies of all these organisations. Action Aid defines the concept of togetherness as the central philosophy driving their communications. Their imagery is intended to capture and portray this notion of togetherness to bring the organisational personality alive; in addition,

‘it is something that sums up a key motivating difference between ActionAid and our ‘competitors’.’ (Action Aid, 2007)

The notions of solidarity are similar in Oxfam’s ‘Be Humankind’ branding concept.

‘At its heart is Oxfam’s belief in the collective power of people. That there is no ‘them’, only ‘us’. And that by working together we can achieve anything.’ (Oxfam, 2011)

The slogan for Oxfam ‘Be Humankind’ captures this type of collective solidarity movement in which attempts are made to break down these barriers.

‘Oxfam is trying to appeal to a new UK audience: An audience that is not interested in the worthiness of Oxfam and other charities, but is interested in justice; an audience who switches off at the sight of a typical charity-looking image, but is interested in

other people; people they can engage and associate with, people whose lives are not so different from their own. We want people to see Oxfam as being like they are: someone they can relate to, who cares about the state of the world – and who is for humanity. So, it's all about people. It's about what makes us human – our humility. It's about our duty as humans to care about other humans, everywhere. It's about together-ness. It's about believing that together we can create change and overcome poverty. But we can't do it unless we all do it.' (Oxfam, 2011)

4.3.6 Protecting Dignity

Despite the protocols and encouragement for positive stories of resilience and empowerment, the interviewees recognised continued tensions in their work: on the one hand the use of images which perpetuate negative stereotypes have successful fundraising outcomes, but these images cannot be too extreme or they risk alienating their audiences and eliciting accusations that they lack respect for the people being photographed.

"There is always the dilemma between wanting to respect the person's dignity, the child, yet show the full horror. This tension exists, especially for agencies who need to raise money and this tension will always be with us.

With the advocacy you tend to give people in the community a voice, by listening to their story and showing that they have dignity. That is the kind of photo you are after – with children speaking up, with children meeting leaders - and using quotes from the community as a representation of what they are saying. Showing people as helpless would not be appropriate simply because you are trying to convey the power they do have. However in certain cases, depending on the advocacy message, maybe on the issue of the children on the street or begging... the ability to show the problem images can potentially be quite powerful. I think people need to see the problem. And it's probably always the case that 'the problem shot' is most often the most difficult shot. Because when you show the problem you also show people at their most vulnerable."
(Regional Communications Director, World Vision)

In regulation this inherent tension is addressed through statements on banned content and judgement criteria.

4.3.7 Banned content and judgement criteria

Despite the negative imagery required and the need to reflect the realities of their beneficiaries' lives which can sometimes contain extreme suffering and violence, certain types of images, such as

those of the deceased or subjects in sexually suggestive poses, are generally banned from use as too graphic for the tolerance levels of audiences.

‘Our strict brand guidelines on images ensure we treat people with dignity and respect. It is the responsibility of [the editorial team] to select images for organisational use based on expert knowledge of [charity] brand. Please do not use the images of dead children.’ (Confidential correspondence to assignment photographer); and

‘In photos, children and adults should be adequately clothed and not in sexually suggestive poses.’ (Confidential document on photography standards)

Several communications managers spoke of the dilemma in the branding strategy that stated a preference for depicting the beneficiary as active and resilient while also requiring portrayals of vulnerability. Clauses allowing for the use of these ‘problem shots’ or negative/passive images under certain circumstances were therefore inserted in the branding strategy:

‘One of the ways to effectively communicate the successful results of World Vision’s work is by showing children not as victims, but as an integral part of practical solutions and as transforming agents of their future. However, where appropriate, an image demonstrating need can also be used to illustrate the context of World Vision’s intervention’’.’ (World Vision 2007, p. 19)

Action Aid guidelines also acknowledge that positive imagery does not always suit certain types of fundraising:

‘As far as possible, and depending on the intended audience and message, we should use positive, dignified images, highlighting effort, resilience, innovations and achievements. However, in certain cases, particularly when soliciting and retaining support for our work, be it financial or otherwise, showing need may be necessary. Also depending on the situation and the target audience, the image may need to portray that the people we work with are not empowered at all.’ (Action Aid, 2007)

The decision to assess the audience levels of tolerance to viewing suffering and violence becomes a subjective one for communication professionals. This personal reflection was cited as an example to highlight the decision-making process during filming in a crisis situation in the Balkans:

“There have been situations which can be quite dramatic not only from a personal point of view but also from a point of view when you are pointing a camera at someone who is going through a very dramatic situation. There were situations and details which I just could not film anymore; and a few seconds is enough to tell the story. One of these was children who were going through some serious physical pain,

because at the end of the day I realised I would never be able to show anyone this, so why film it?" (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

One trend advised by organisational policy is a reflective strategy to determine whether images are appropriate for use. One approach is to pose the question:

'Would I be happy to be portrayed this way?' (Oxfam, 2011).

'What if it were your own child?' (UNICEF, 2009)

This method of assessing appropriateness is explained by the Chief of Communications, UNICEF:

"The dignity of the child is important so you cannot show something you would feel uncomfortable if it were your own child. Why should you, if you wouldn't do it with your own child? We think this is fair judgement"

Although not conclusive, and most likely debatable in certain circumstances, it nonetheless offers a consistent assessment method aimed to ensure the dignity of subjects, across the various communications projects. Guidelines do not and are not able to offer definitive answers in these assessments requiring subjective evaluations. Two such scenarios were given to me by communications professionals to exemplify the complexity of interpreting guidelines and branding codes in practice.

The first was a situation encountered during the Asian Tsunami of 2005 that demonstrates the conflicting evaluations of responsibilities between the members of the organisation.

"It's not like this is a cut and dried issue - it is a constant back and forth even though the protection issue is very strict in policy. I remember during the tsunami in Sri Lanka we had a child protection officer, who said we can't use any images because of the fear (often over-exaggerated in my opinion) that in disaster people are vulnerable to trafficking. So the directive said we can't identify the children in the camps, we cannot show faces, names or show the location. From a communications perspective my question is: how can I write anything if I cannot use an image that says nothing about the person? There is always the battle with the best interests of the child. As a child protection officer the job is to look at the best interests of That Child, not children in general. As a communicator you are always trying to use the story of That Child in order to tell a wider story about children in those circumstances and the best interests of children in general. This causes quite a lot of friction – both parties need something different." (Regional Communications Director, World Vision)

In the second scenario the dilemma outlines the complexity in the image selection process and how the dignity of the child is best protected. The decision relates to a story for a supporter magazine⁴¹ providing human interest stories on programmes in the country. The cover story was about a programme aimed to promote calcium-rich diets for children and the complexity of treating rickets, an illness caused by the lack of calcium. Rickets causes bone deformities along with the social stigma attached to the disability. The dilemma revolved round how to portray five-year old Jasmeen. The first image taken by the photographer was of Jasmeen and her mother arriving at the steps of the clinic. The image showed the severe deformity of her legs as she was walking. A decision was made to lay her on the table to show the full extent of her disability and to allow for a more distant perspective without showing her face and eyes.

"This case shows there is a way we can take pictures which is not discriminating or making them look bad. It is also possible to argue you are protecting their identity however I don't think this is the case. If you know the child, you will recognise them and it's worse for the child in the end as in this case. Her identity is not protected even when we use this image of the child on the table. However at the same time we have to show the problem. These are the situations which are sometimes very difficult: how to protect her identity, when this is in fact the child and the way she looks. I think showing any type of handicap is a difficult one." (Chief of Communications, UNICEF Bangladesh)

4.3.8 Informed Consent and Protection of Subjects

Informed consent is an ethical and practical concern when sourcing images and different organisations adopted varying degrees of formality in the process. These positions on the subject varied across the documents from the legislated demands to the use of formalised consent forms.

"Before we use an image of a subject, we must ensure we have their written consent."
(Action Aid 2007, Section 2.9)

The use of subject release forms is generally recommended although some guidelines allowed more informal standards of ensuring informed consent by photographers:

'They should identify themselves and ensure subject(s) have a general understanding of the purpose of their reporting or photography.' (Confidential document to assignment photographer)

⁴¹ UNICEF Bangladesh Newsletter, Issue 13, September 2009, p.1.

The use of written consent forms (or subject release forms) is thought to protect the photographic subject against false or non-consensual commercial use of their image. However, as discussed in the previous sections, misleading captions over which the subject had no control could easily undermine these protocols and photographs can be digitally manipulated to change their meaning, neither of which are covered in the written consent forms. There is also an argument that these forms are most useful in protecting the organisation from potential legal repercussions rather than providing protection to the subject. The Image guidelines of UNICEF explain:

‘Especially if their stories are sensitive or controversial, this release ensures that they have reflected on their consent to be photographed and will not subsequently legally challenge its veracity.’ (UNICEF 2009, p.3)

Another organisation’s sourcing standards reflect this position:

‘The form establishes a useful record for legal purposes.’ (Confidential internal document)

A variety of consent forms and commercial model release forms were shown to me by communications management when I approached the topic of ethics in representations. For example, the UNICEF Communications Team provided me with their forms. As per their organisational policy for children under the age of 18, a legal guardian of the child must grant permission in addition to the child’s consent. The form states:

‘By signing this release form, I hereby grant to the United Nation’s Children’s Fund (UNICEF) the right to reproduce, display and disseminate worldwide and in perpetuity, in any traditional or electronic media format, my likeness as shown in the photographs described below, which are owned by UNICEF, including in fundraising partnerships with commercial entities.’

Special consideration was given to children identified as HIV-positive but did not guarantee their anonymity. It reads:

‘This form is to ensure that you and your family (or other guardian/s) understand and agree to have your story – as a person who is HIV-positive – published by UNICEF in order to promote awareness about, and secure fundraising and programme support for children who are affected by HIV/AIDS.’

It continues, ‘This means that your name and/or image may appear in any media format, including but not limited to, print, video, web sites, billboards, posters, etc.

This form authorises the use of your name/image in this context. It also permits the use of your image without identifying either your name or your HIV status, to promote other UNICEF information and fundraising.’

Signing these forms essentially gives all rights of the use of the image to the organisation without adding clauses for retracting consent. The forms were often presented as a protective mechanism to ensure the rights of the subjects however the text is highly contradictory to these claims and reads as a legal contract to reveal the identity of the subject and to protect the agency’s rights for distribution. The final use of the images is not stipulated and secures the legal rights of the organisation.

Photographing children poses additional considerations for organisations working within the framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The articles in the UNCRC with most direct relevance in the sphere of humanitarian photography are Article 16 on the right to privacy⁴² and Article 13 on the freedom of expression⁴³. Taking the UNCRC on board involves a consideration of the potential future consequences of images and whether the children in them would be recognised or stigmatised. Again this is not something consent procedures or communications management could ensure.

This tension between the child’s right to privacy and the right for expression to acknowledged in UNICEF policy:

‘However, there are instances where risks exist to use a particular image, but arguments for publishing are valid. This is the case, for example, with child advocates who have chosen to take a public stance on a potentially high-risk subject...In such instances, the child’s right to expression and participation in issues affecting him/her must be respected.’(UNICEF 2009, p.3)

The predictions of potential future harm to the subjects and their full understanding of the potential consequences is another complex consideration:

“They [child subjects] often don’t know about the full implications and how far the story goes, but you also have to bear in mind is the child old enough to even consider

⁴² Article 16.1 reads ‘No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation.’

⁴³ Article 13.1 reads ‘The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice.’

that question. We obviously want to protect the identity of people who have been raped, abused or trafficked children who may have lost mothers or fathers or orphaned through HIV/AIDS – so here we try to keep identities secret.” (Chief of Communications, UNICEF Thailand)

Other organisations attempt to overcome these dilemmas by banning all images of the children they work with. One advocacy organisation working in issues of commercial sexual exploitation, End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography and the Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes (ECPAT) bans use of all photography of children in their communications work:

‘No photograph or image of an identifiable child may be used in any ECPAT International publication to illustrate any aspect of the commercial sexual exploitation of children. Nor may an image of an identifiable child be used in any ECPAT International publication if it might reasonably lead the viewer to believe that the child is a victim of commercial sexual exploitation. This prohibition stands regardless of consent given by either the child, any adult legally responsible for their care, or any agency which may own the photograph.’ (ECPAT, n.d.)

4.4 Media and NGOs: Tensions and cycles of reporting

Cottle and Nolan argue that NGOs have succumbed to the ‘media logic’ (2007, p.863) in which the main goal of achieving competitive advantage over competitors has compromised their integrity and ethics in the project of global humanitarianism. The NGO communications functions have expanded into actively promoting their presence and activities for inclusion in media coverage. Nolan and Cottle go on to argue that the relationship between media organisations and NGOs is not solely a struggle of vested interested and organisational objectives, but that the humanitarian industry as a whole is defined by blatant competition for visibility between NGOs which has transformed the overall relationship between media and NGOs into an increasingly connected one.

The majority of the communications managers interviewed for this research had previous education and careers in journalism, and therefore usually had an in-depth comprehension of the cycles of reporting, deadline pressures and the interests of the media organisations. While there was competitiveness between humanitarian organisations in the field, the main tension interviewees tended to discuss was in the case of the media’s coverage of humanitarian disasters. They argued that facts were manipulated and skewed to suit media needs rather than providing balanced views of populations affected by disasters and humanitarian events.

"The first few days of messages is disempowering to the communities because it makes them feel like they are helpless, and in order for aid intervention to work you must have all of these white guys and girls come in with their aid, otherwise it's hopeless. Of course aid is important, but you should never underemphasise the communities who from day one are struggling with the issues, of dirty water and poor medical care – they deal with them on a day to day basis and are already quite resilient." (Regional Communications Director, World Vision)

However they also acknowledged that the media has a role in alerting wider audiences to situations of crisis, particularly in the coverage of disasters which provides an opportune platform on which NGO communications projects can be launched. Audiences are alerted to the initial crises through the media, which often depicts suffering populations in desperate situations in graphic ways, and this relieves the need for NGOs to show strong negative imagery for their own fundraising efforts, since such imagery has already been effectively disseminated through the media. Media reporting raises awareness of situations and shows images which would not be acceptable within the NGOs' own publications and which would violate their own branding policies which mandate them to represent with dignity and positivity. However in cases where the media is not providing coverage, the depiction of need in crisis situations is not banned and allowances for this are made in guidelines.

'When there's major news coverage we don't use photos. When there isn't we do, keeping photos real and journalistic in style.' (Oxfam, 2011)

The ability to predict news cycles assists in tailoring communications projects and issuing press releases at opportune times. There was much agreement between the communications managers about the cycles of humanitarian reporting. They agreed that the initial coverage shows the destruction, massive need and suffering of a situation. Images during this phase portray a sense of helplessness, making it ideal for the launching of fundraising campaigns, highlighting the sense of urgency and the need for intervention. After the initial crisis coverage, the cycle then moves onto the arrival of aid agencies, which is often accompanied by a journalistic critique suggesting that NGO efforts are unorganised and too slow to react. Wider societal speculation on why the disaster was not prevented and/or minimised is followed by estimates on recovery timescales and costs. The coverage then starts to focus on individual and community level stories where people are trying to

help themselves. Within this general cycle the focus will be on women and children as the most vulnerable.

"Because seeing people, women, children, men getting food is fine and dandy, but you need to keep the audience going, so you have to go from the vulnerable to the most vulnerable...everyone is initially most vulnerable but once the adults get organised then you start looking at who is more so: handicapped, children and pooch. Children and orphanages – and often they are the most vulnerable and depending on the situation they are the ones forgotten in the big picture. If these orphanages already have international donorship then they are able to quickly get further support. If these were local NGO and community run orphanages, then they may not have access to issuing press reports, etc." (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

Despite the seemingly antagonistic relationship between the media and the NGO communications management, there is nonetheless an exchange of access for publicity. Their symbiotic relationship is defined by the needs of journalists to access powerful stories as quickly as possible, which NGOs have access to if they have operations on location, and with NGOs requiring visibility for their work. The benefits of this exchange decrease as the initial event ceases to be news-worthy. The media environment informed by the competition for readers, ratings and revenue provides short-term and limited coverage of the context or historical background or of the post-disaster period and the longer-term processes of development. The challenge for communications is to sustain coverage during the periods of recovery, rehabilitation and rebuilding. The Communications Manager for UNDP noted the impossibility of attracting the media once the approximate three-week reporting cycle is complete, making longer-term projects requiring sustained funding more challenging to publicise and fundraise. He spoke about the flooding situation during Cyclone Sidr in 2007 in Bangladesh:

"Bangladesh was going through a silent disaster – in that, the first few months the media was there and covering it. It was receiving TV footage, donors were feeling interested and giving assistance. When the water disappeared it didn't mean that everything was back to normal, they still had broken houses, lost crops and everything, but how to portray that through photograph or video – it was impossible." (Communications Manager, UNDP)

The mutual reliance of media and NGOs in their activities is increasingly linked as an exchange of visibility for access. Additionally to ensure visibility is maximised, some larger NGOs are

producing complementary footage and documentaries which proves attractive on the part of media organisations. With NGO intentions driving these documentary projects and reporting, editorial independence comes under question and there may be bias in the content of these reports.

By aligning their communications needs with the predicted needs of media, NGOs maximise the opportunities for the 'silent disasters' and long-term development projects to be made visible. The Regional Information Officer for ECHO identified the upcoming elections in Burma in the following year as an opportunity to highlight the refugee programmes supported by his agency on the Thai-Burmese border region:

"A BBC reporter just came to do a piece on Burmese communities on this side of the border because everyone is preparing for the elections – they are trying to focus on Burma and get some fresh pictures of the projects because there will be a greater interest from journalists on the issues. If I send them a fax, that says we are providing an additional amount for these communities and we can provide some quotes or sound-bites on what we are doing there to fill their lines by doing a news piece. Then there is going to be increased interest on that subject."

The rapid cycles of reporting and the speed with which focus shifts in news cycles contributes to the pressures to produce consistently new material. New technologies, and particularly the internet platforms which support communications, add to the need for instantaneous updating of materials.

"Being current on all fronts is difficult to sustain ... now people want to get on the website and see immediately. This means continuously changing content and images with pressure on NGOs to produce material. Also if you don't then someone else will do it. So you have to play the communications game." (Senior Communications Consultant, UNICEF)

Despite the cooperation with the media and the shift to media logic by NGOs, a tension remains with journalists in sourcing images when news demands infringe on the protection, safety and security of NGO beneficiaries.

"Direct cooperation [with media] can induce problems: It's very difficult to control the media and the types of photos they take. We do understand they have their own agenda." (Regional Communications Manager, Save the Children)

The potential for non-cooperation to lead to dire consequences was recognised and was expressed as follows:

“With the press you have to be very clear about what are the implications of your story... There have been cases in work with videographers who were upset because they want access to children in the rehabilitation centre after they’ve been trafficked, and we firmly say no. For them it’s the final piece of the story – however experience has shown they can be quite forthright to threaten us with negative publicity if we don’t allow access. It is pretty difficult and we have to be upfront with journalists about what we can do. They tend to be the journalists who are flown in – because they are under pressure to get the story.” (Regional Communications Director, World Vision)

4.5 Chapter Conclusions

The chapter showed the constraints within which communications management operates and how they strive to maximise visibility while minimising the tensions which arise from the differing aims of professionals within the organisation, the need for ethical decisions which conform to regulation while also producing engaging communications campaigns. The conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity weave through the considerations and examples in practice exemplified the complexity and the subjectivity involved in judgements despite the emphasis on branding protocol. The media was assumed to hold key significance in NGO visibility and as a productive tool, however this claim was not substantiated, only the tensions between the vested interests between NGO and media organisation objectives were more acutely raised.

The next chapters are focused on the level of photographers in the field. They present the practicalities of choosing, selecting and negotiating interactions and how these ethical regulations and concerns reveal themselves in practice. Chapter 5 presents three short assignments which were commissioned as part of relatively structured projects to provide single images for ‘documentation’ purposes. Chapter 6 proceeds to present a lengthy documentary assignment involving numerous human-interest stories.

Chapter 5

Short Assignments: Case Studies One, Two and Three

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data from three short photographic assignments which were conducted between March 2010 and January 2011, while Chapter 6 presents Case Study Four, a six-day documentary assignment. Both chapters 5 and 6 present detailed accounts of events as they occurred in the field and have been included in this format to exemplify the processes and practices of production in highly volatile contexts. They highlight ethical issues which arise on site and how these are negotiated by the photographers. This exemplifies the continual ethical considerations which demand the attention and decision-making of the photographer, and documents the constraints, including the physical, technological, logistical and interpersonal aspects and how the vested interests of the various groups are played out and negotiated in context.

Case Study One is an assignment for an international NGO called Reading Room⁴⁴ to produce images of a school reading programme. The shoot took place during a regular field visit by the Country Director and I was invited to join in a research capacity.

Case Study Two is an account of one day of a multi-day assignment with a senior photographer, Ahmed, who was commissioned by a large corporation, to be referred to as MoCon. The aim was to produce images of two people featured in the company's corporate social responsibility (CSR) communications publication. My invitation to participate was in the role of photographer's assistant. The advertising agency representatives, an account manager and designer, who were responsible for executing the final report, also joined for filming to provide direction for the types of images that were required for the publication format.

⁴⁴ Pseudonyms are used for case study organisations.

Case Study Three is an assignment for which I was the commissioned photographer with the task of documenting a beneficiary of a girls' education programme for Reading Room. This is the same educational charity as in Case Study One and the contract was offered by the Country Director approximately a year after our original meeting. The images were required for a progress report in the sponsor magazine which provided updates on the progress of individual beneficiaries and the lives of their families to demonstrate the positive impact of the NGO programme. This auto-ethnographic account explores the issues of filming and offers a reflexive perspective to assignment photography. The presentation of the empirical data in this chapter includes brief background information on the assignments, the commissioners' directives as they were revealed on the day of shooting and descriptions of the assignments as they occurred.

5.2 Case Study One: The Reading Programme Assignment

5.2.1 Location and Context

The location of this case study is in Brahmanbaria district, located in the east-central region of the country, bordering the Indian north-eastern state of Tripura. The region has a rich tradition of arts, education and culture and is figuratively called the cultural capital of Bangladesh⁴⁵. The district has been home to many of the renowned names in the field of literature and music and it has been an important base for national movements and the birthplace of many nationalist leaders⁴⁶. According to the Country Director, the region is currently tightly controlled by a conservative Muslim local government although formerly it was an area inhabited by a majority Hindu population. During the Independence Struggle it saw great violence and displacement of communities, resulting in a general suspicion of non-Muslim and foreign influences. It therefore hosts few NGO development projects and any new proposals have been met with resistance. The educational charity represented in the case study was one of the only international charities allowed to operate in the region. As an educational charity, their mandate was to cooperate with school authorities and work within the existing structures, supporting teacher training and procuring reading materials for the promotion of literacy in classrooms. In other areas of the country, international NGO educational programmes

⁴⁵ <http://bangladeshtalks.com/2011/05/brahmanbaria-district-information/> retrieved 20 April 2012

⁴⁶ Leaders like Nawab Syed Shamsul Huda, who became president of All India Muslim League in 1921, and Barrister Abdur Rasul a front ranking leader of Indian National Congress, in addition to Oli Ahad, who was a pioneer of the Language Movement.

had created parallel institutions operating independently from the local school structures leading to criticisms of the local government for delegating responsibility to outsiders and the Country Director of Reading Room felt that this created a potentially dangerous system in which NGOs and international agencies become the providers of social services which should remain under government jurisdiction.

The Country Director was a well-spoken, quick-witted man and he used the four-hour car journey to discuss his thoughts on his organisation, the development industry and his experiences with international agencies. He presented the Reading Room organisation as a new model of humanitarian assistance which approached development through education and promotion of literacy, and used a management model of accountability towards its funders and donors. To increase trust among its donors, and to encourage potential new ones, a global online tracking database, inclusive of images, was put in place and had become a valuable reporting tool. Donors were able to follow the use of their money and the system had proved successful with their funding base which consisted of large sum donations by private individual donors.

The headquarters of the NGO was located in the United States but had expanded its operations to nine countries. The Bangladeshi office was opened two years previously and ran two types of programmes: a school reading programme and girls' education programme. The first of these programmes involved setting up classroom libraries in which the NGO supplied books, furniture and paint for the decoration of classrooms, and the promotion of a reading hour on a regular basis. It also offered teacher training in promoting reading skills and the use of supplementary reading materials as part of the regular curriculum. The second programme supported girls living in vulnerable and remote areas, with school materials, transportation and other support services provided in order to encourage participation in education (Case Study Three is a commission for this second programme).

This assignment documented the Reading Room programme in a rural school in Brahmanbaria. This was the first time the NGO had commissioned a professional photographer to document activities at this location. The assignment was a structured photographic assignment at a school; however the photographer was free to choose the subjects from the class population. The commissioner joined for the day without intervening, only providing comments when asked.

The guidelines for the photographer asked for single strong images without the need to document details of the subjects or their experiences. According to the Country Director the images were to be single strong images for various purposes: for use in presentation materials, annual reports, fundraising and the donor database. He had specifically chosen to work with the photographer, Saikat, based on previous negative experiences with freelance photographers. He felt Saikat worked well with children and caused minimal disruption in the school environment.

5.2.2 Getting to Know the Photographer

The photographer was of a younger generation of photographers trained in the social documentary style at Pathshala, the photographic school affiliated with Drik. He had been working for less than two years as a professional photographer and had chosen this profession despite objections from his family who did not view photography as a reliable career choice. However after his success in securing assignments and gaining recognition through awards, they had changed their views and supported him. During his training he had developed a personal project called, *Life: Born in a Slum*⁴⁷. This documented the life of a pregnant slum dweller and her family during her pregnancy, recording her in labour and then followed her and her child through the first six months of the baby's life. This story challenged many social taboos, in particular that of being a male and entering the private moments of an unrelated woman's life. This however reflects his soft and unintimidating character. He did not speak much but had a warm presence and was dressed in fashionably loose jeans, trainers and a button-up shirt which made him stand out from the rural population as a young professional urbanite. His movements and way of looking also stood out as he initially appeared rather aloof, consistently scoping his surroundings with little, if any, extended interaction with anyone. It was only after the photo shoot that he engaged with me. Before our arrival I asked him about his approach and feelings about the assignment and he answered my question succinctly – “easy, nothing different from the others” and did not comment further.

5.2.3 The Filming Events

Brahmanbaria, 31 March 2010

⁴⁷ <http://www.photography-news.com/2010/03/life-born-in-slum-photo-essay-by-saikat.html> retrieved 1 October 2011.

We arrive in a chauffeur driven white Lexus to the rural school surrounded by paddy-fields and winding rivers. With it being the dry season the fields were brown and the river banks dry. There are two single-story school buildings and in each, there are four classrooms with windows facing both the paddy field side and the school yard. The windows are barred, with wooden shutters to close when needed. We enter the school yard and Saikat has his cameras ready. We are greeted first by a few children who linger outside and they escort us to the principal's office. I am introduced as a guest and friend of the charity and sit for a few minutes as part of a respectful audience but excuse myself to find Saikat studying the classroom where he is to shoot. I find him outside the classroom housing the library that consists of a white Ikea-esque bookshelf stacked with a solid selection of books in the corner of the green classroom.

Scene 1: The Younger Class

We enter the class, Saikat organises his two cameras on the teacher's desk and moves aside to observe the class and its procession. The classroom is segregated with the girls on the left, next to the windows overlooking the rice paddies and the boys, who form only one-fourth of the forty-some students are seated next to the windows facing the school yard. The male teacher stops the reading lesson and introduces Saikat and what he is there to do. The lesson continues with children reading their books in pairs as Saikat surveys the room and observes a few of the children more intently. Many keep one eye on him, only getting back to their books when the teacher's gaze returns to their direction. Saikat approaches the girls next to the window and asks basic questions: what is your name and what are you reading? He kneels down to eye level– still with his cameras on the desk. He makes contact and allows time for the children to be comfortable with him. (Photograph 1)

Saikat and the classroom activity provide a spectacle for the children who are let out on break and the windows facing into the classroom provide an ideal position to view the proceedings. The commotion eventually escalates with children hanging on the window bars and squabbles erupting when the smaller ones are pushed out of the way. Teachers disperse them with threats of wooden rulers, which leave children skittering off but returning as soon as the teacher deals with another crisis. The resulting solution is to close the shutters. This affects the lighting in the room, and the opposite windows facing the rice paddies are the only source of natural light. Flash is required for inside shooting and restricts the choice of subjects so Saikat works with the girls closest to the window to maximise the available natural light. The day is overcast but the semi-diffused light is opportune for highlighting bright colours. (Photograph 2) With the newly painted classroom in a green, the blue school uniforms and dark skinned children, the images have depth.

After the calm has returned to the classroom Saikat continues to chat with the same girls, now with a camera in his hand– and focuses on a girl with a bob and a short fringe showing off her delicate features. She reads out loud. He takes a picture. As the shutter releases the whole class's attention is on her. She looks embarrassed and starts reading with her head down with a finger in her mouth. This blocks her face and Saikat stops with the camera down - waits for her to relax, but she doesn't

and at this point he knows he cannot force this and takes a step back and puts the camera down. He kneels in between another set of girls and asks them to read for him without attempting to take a picture.

The teacher then continues the lesson, and Saikat takes some upper angle shots of a girl with short spiked hair in the back row. She is next to the window so the light is good and she also has very animated features, but again, she becomes tense when she realises the camera is on her. The camera's shutter release snaps in the silence of reading and whispering children, making some quieter and alerting others to the action.



Photograph 1 – Getting to know the students ©Author



Photograph 2 - Classroom filming ©Author

The third girl who comes into Saikat's focus is an older girl about ten years of age with elegant features who has been watching him closely. She reads with great enthusiasm, flips the pages of her book with sweeping motion, takes a deep breath before embarking on the text, reading the whole page in that single breath, before restarting, again with a deep inhalation to the next page. The book has large animated pictures which she studies occasionally. When Saikat turns his lens on her, she acknowledges him but continues without interruption. He tells her to continue reading but standing this time and she does without any further guidance from Saikat and poses gracefully with a smile - with significantly less drama than before. (Photograph 3)



Photograph 3 - Final Image
©Mojumder, MW/Drik

Saikat then points to her classmate who has a wide smile from across the aisle to join. They then proceed to read one by one and when one of them points at the pictures in the book, there is a flurry of shots. (Photograph 4) They get excited and read quicker now, both pointing and commenting but each taking turns.

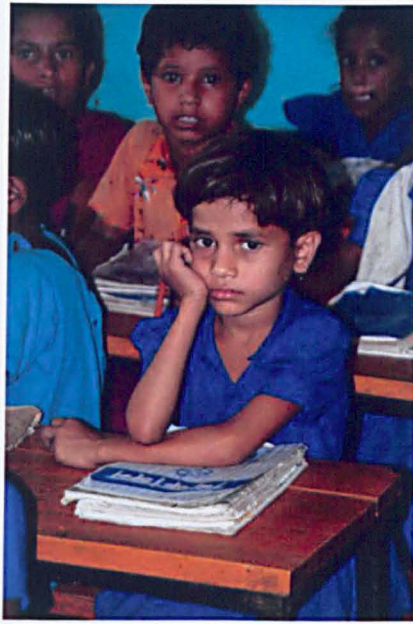


Photograph 4 - Final Image ©Mojumder, MW/Drik



Photograph 5 - Classroom filming ©Author

This interaction becomes the main spectacle and limits the concentration for the reading exercise. Laughter and noises escalate from the paddy field until four boys appear hanging off the window bars struggling to see what is happening in the classroom. The teacher tells them to get back to class with a threatening tone and then to the class, ‘back to your books’. However not all of the students participate, some look bored, others distracted and prefer to look out the window. One petite girl observes me intently throughout, expressionless. (Photograph 6) She is not participating in any of the activities either. With the windows closed the classroom gets very hot and humid. It is clear students have difficulty concentrating and it is time to move on.



Photograph 6 – Observing the Visitor
©Author

Saikat chooses five students from the group, three girls and two boys whom he tells to meet him under the big tree in the schoolyard. The break period is finished and children return to their classrooms leaving the five outside. He sits the girls on a protruding root which provides a suitable bench to for all three (Photograph 7) and he directs the boys to lean against the tree trunk. (Photograph 8) A boy without a school uniform follows Saikat who acknowledges him and asks if he wants to be his assistant. He holds Saikat's second camera at first standing frozen too scared to move. On his way to direct the group Saikat walks past me and says with a smile – they love being helpers. The assistant attracts more boys and they all take turns to peer into the lens when Saikat is not looking.

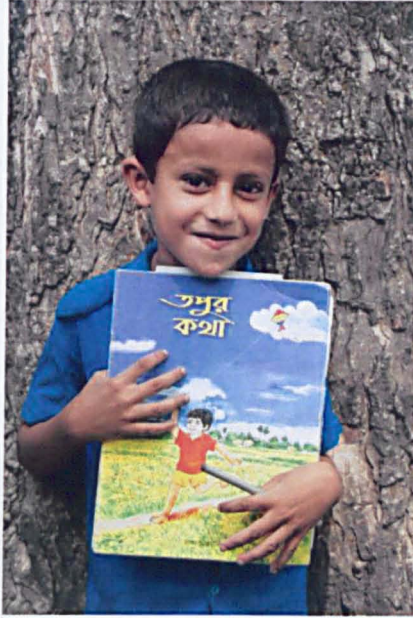


Photograph 7 - Final Image ©Mojumder MW/Drik



Photograph 8 - Final Image ©Mojumder MW/Drik

Saikat lets the five students read and doesn't intervene, then rearranges their position slightly – moving one of the girls to face the other two. He then chooses the younger of the boys, who is very nervous. He kneels down to his level and asks him if he wants to participate – the boy says yes, so Saikat proceeds to write a secret message on his hand with a pen. The boy is enjoying the attention and stands next to the tree as he is asked and holds position for the next few shots. (Photograph 9)



Photograph 9 - Final Image
©Mojumder MW/Drik

Scene 2: The Older class

The second class is older - between the ages of 12-14 years. Half the girls are wearing head scarves and the ones without have their hair tied back neatly in headbands and ponytails. There are only five boys in the class of about 25 who are segregated and sit next to the door. The female teacher in her fifties stands strategically next to them with a ruler in hand. She notices I am observing and tells me, tapping her ruler on the desk of the boy in the front row, “this one is very naughty, keep your eyes on him”. Saikat assumes his position next to the window again working with the natural light. This group is more manageable and the girls are eager to pose – they comb their hair with their fingers, adjust their dress, there are more smiles and it seems they are more confident and better able to predict what Saikat is after.



Photograph 10 - Final Image ©Mojumder MW/Drik

Saikat focuses on two girls reading together, one with a very short fringe. (Photograph 10) He leans against a wall for some shots and, fully engrossed in his lens, he doesn't notice the chalky paint that has stained the back of his shirt. The students giggle thinking it is very funny. The teacher doesn't. She shakes her head and says to me "they [the charity] chose the cheapest paint".

After about 10 minutes of working with three of the girls we move outside and a girl without a school uniform or head scarf is chosen to pose with a book. At the same time school is out and children exit classrooms attracted by the unusual happening taking place. I help Saikat to ensure no one walks in the lens and allow them to sit outside the frame to watch if they wish. They do and excitedly try and get closer to Saikat and look into his viewfinder when he checks the quality of his pictures. (Photograph 11, Photograph 12, Photograph 13)



Photograph 11 – The vision in front of the lens. ©Author



Photograph 12 – The vision behind the lens. ©Author



Photograph 13 – Rush to preview. ©Author

5.2.4 Reflections after the Shoot

During the return journey I asked my new colleagues about issues of consent. Saikat informed me that according to Drik protocol there are model release forms which are used for commercial assignments. The Country Director clarified his organisation's policy on consent and said that they did not have such formal procedures even though consent forms are commonly used by other organisations. He claimed that his experience in the development and humanitarian context in

Bangladesh had shown consent forms to be problematic, particularly because the subjects in these types of assignments were people from vulnerable communities who are generally illiterate. In addition, histories of land disputes and evictions added to the general hesitancy to sign contractual forms. In his experience most people faced with consent forms would refuse to participate in filming through fears of being deceived out of land ownership or, in areas susceptible to child trafficking, of being tricked into selling their children.

During the day I witnessed both children and adults being informed of the purpose of the photographs. When the teachers were waiting to be photographed, the Director had asked for their consent to participate. The three teachers appeared perplexed at the request with the principal eventually intervening with a yes. I thought this situation needed explaining and asked about it later in the car and the Country Director explained: *“as you saw with the teachers, they thought I was mad – asking them the obvious. It was obvious they were going to be in the picture with the photographer there. But this is the nature of the business, we have to go through the protocol.”*

Saikat appeared slightly hesitant when showing the images because many of them had been posed. The Country Director responded:

“when I say I don’t like the pictures it is not because they are arranged or because they look arranged. It is because they are not looking at the book or there is no life in the image. I am not concerned whether the audience thinks this is arranged or not. People must know they are being photographed. We cannot hide the camera.” To which Saikat answers, *“we can always hide a camera”* as a joke; but this was not taken as such: *“Yes, technically but not ethically”*.

5.3 Case Study Two: The Corporate Social Responsibility Assignment

5.3.1 The Photographer

I was first introduced to the cooperative of freelance photographers of which Ahmed was a founding member by an NGO commissioner who regularly made use of their work. The cooperative of about eight freelance photographers worked on social documentary assignments and catered primarily to NGOs. During my interview with Ahmed he described himself as one of the

three senior photographers of Bangladesh who formed the first generation of photographers able to sustain a living from the profession. He had over 25 years of experience and expressed his preference for in-depth social documentary assignments. His personal project was documenting the lives and lifestyles of people in the more remote regions in Bangladesh and in this project he had complete artistic freedom. Despite his preference, he worked regularly on more commercial NGO shoots which provided a necessary source of income and enabled him to finance his personal projects. Many of his other personal projects were developed into books and after viewing his images my initial impression was of a naturalistic style and little manipulation of images. He agreed with this assessment claiming he preferred to focus on the interaction and moment of photographing without excessive manipulation of images, altering only the brightness and with limited use of cropping.

5.3.2 Background to the Assignment

Mobile Connect (herein referred to as MoCon) is one of the largest companies in the telecommunications industry in Bangladesh. It is an instantly recognisable brand and its core communications strategy (according to the representatives from the advertising agency) is to remain close to the people. Most of its advertising communications therefore utilise documentary style photography and this is apparent from the billboards spotted around Dhaka. The company began as an innovative NGO initiative with the premise of providing affordable mobile technologies to the population, as a way of encouraging small businesses and the development of rural regions. At the time of the assignment the company was one of the most profitable firms in the country. This particular communications project was for the annual corporate social responsibility (CSR) report for the shareholders, highlighting the activities of the company for the year 2009. According to the designer, the agency had sold the concept of 'lifestyle and real story' format, a similar format used for NGO campaigns. It was based around the personal stories of six individuals who had achieved their dreams with the help of the company (emphasised by the campaign slogan "*I too have a dream*") and this was the message of the Annual Report. In addition to the official report the images were to be compiled into a book, potentially also into an exhibition, and there was to be a national launch in a few weeks time. This made the shooting schedule tight. The commissioning company had specifically requested Ahmed be assigned to the project.

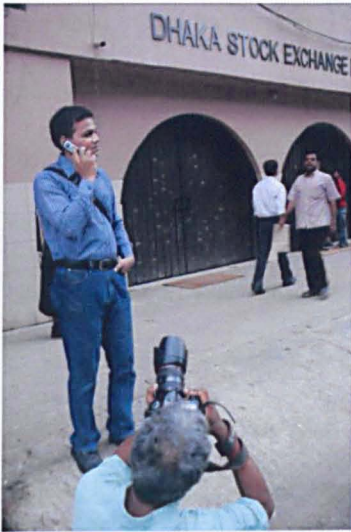
The advertising agency had prepared a prototype of the publication. The individual stories of six people had been provided by the company's communications team but the graphic design and final edit were to be produced by the advertising agency. Therefore the two women assigned for this project were present for the day to ensure the images were appropriate for the format. My own involvement in this project covered the filming of two of the six people. The first was a shareholder, who had realised his dream through ownership of company shares, and the second was a young girl with Down's syndrome who had overcome stigmatisation and become a badminton champion.

The first person to be filmed was the shareholder. The shooting location was in front of the Dhaka Stock Exchange building which was thought to portray him as cosmopolitan and successful. According to the brief given by the advertising agency he was an orphan who desired to find a way of belonging. Becoming a shareholder in the company eventually brought him this. Before the shoot Ahmed and I read the story together and, according to him, the key message as he saw it was "[the company] is not just a business organisation, it is an enabler of dreams" drawing on notions of hope and positivity.

5.3.3 The Shareholder

Motijheel, Dhaka, 1 April 2010.

The Dhaka Stock Exchange is not open at this time of the morning which had been planned to make shooting easier. The Shareholder is waiting for us when we arrive and is a well-built man, with a friendly face. There is very little exchange beyond the initial greetings and Ahmed explains he wants some portrait shots in front of the building. The shareholder pulls out two shirts still in original packaging from his laptop case and asks which is better. Blue, the Designer replies. The morning is foggy so the light conditions are not ideal but the shooting begins as the advertising agency women look on. Ahmed takes some silhouette shots making sure to include the networks of cables and wires in the pictures, a distinctive feature of the Dhaka street scene.



Photograph 14 – The shareholder in front of the Exchange. ©Author



Photograph 15 – Some practice shots. ©Author

After the portrait shots Ahmed asks the shareholder to walk in front of the stock exchange building with a laptop case over his shoulder to capture him in action. The light is still not ideal and the shareholder movements are rigid. Ahmed reviews the pictures in his viewfinder and does not look pleased and says: “Do it again and relax. Why do you look so awkward carrying that bag...what do you normally carry?”

“A gun”, he replies matter-of-factly adjusting the bag over his shoulder and turning back to go over the scene again.

Ahmed lowers his camera, puzzled.

He realises the bluntness of his answer, “I am a police officer”. The advertising agency ladies look at each other and as Ahmed chuckles, the ladies smile with relief.

Ahmed had not been informed that he was a model and had been led to assume that his photographic subjects were the actual people linked to actual stories. This was the conclusion I had also made from the way the stories and assignment brief had been presented. He seemed unaffected as he held the view that models made the shoot easier since they were comfortable in front of the camera and knew what was wanted. However, he said it was:

“difficult making them [images] real...you have to get them[the models] thinking in the role so you can shoot the images, and also view them as if they were the real people. So the pictures are arranged, but not arranged.”

5.3.4 The Badminton Champion

The second person for the day’s shoot was a school girl called Anoushka who has Down’s syndrome. The advertising brief also explained that she had excelled at badminton and her success

was recognised by winning the gold medal at the Bangladesh Special Youth Olympics which was sponsored by MoCon. The brief began with a description of her mother's pain at finding out that she had a disabled daughter and the stigmatisation and marginalisation by her community which followed. It told of her sadness when other mothers did not allow their children to play with her daughter. However, Anoushka had a talent for badminton and the previous year had represented the country at the International Youth Special Olympics in China and had been sponsored through the company's CSR programme. It was through badminton that Anoushka had developed confidence and the brief ended by recounting the parents' pride when her name was called out in front of 5000 people to receive her gold medal. The final line of the story: 'We no longer call her different, we now call her special'.

Scene 1: Meeting Anoushka

Anoushka's mother, an elegant woman with long flowing hair greets us at the door. She has high cheek bones, a wide smile and a distinctive beauty mark on her left cheek. We enter the drawing room and are seated with initial introductions by the women from the ad agency who have been in contact with her previously. As she is speaking, Ahmed whispers to me "I am going to find out the real story, because I have my doubts about the brief" – understandably after the events of the morning. Double checking all the information commissioners give him without taking anything at face value is a part what he sees as his professional responsibility, a point he had conveyed to me during our first interview.

Anoushka still has not entered the room and we are all wondering where she is. We can hear her in the back room and are waiting to meet her. Her mother continues to speak of her pride in hearing Anoushka's name being called to receive the prize. This confirms that the brief provided to us reflected the actual story and was not the creative work of the communications department.

Anoushka enters. She is tall, about 170cm, with a strong athletic physique and wears an orange salwar kameez. She has just washed her hair and she enters shyly, sits next to her mother looking at her feet with a comb in her hand. Her mother encourages her to say hello and we stare at her – I am confused and think I have misunderstood. It was obvious this girl did not have Down's syndrome. I look around - I am not the only one, all four of us stare at her – she is aware of this and her mother breaks into the silence to serve tea and sweets. We all remain in a state of confusion until Ahmed takes control of the situation and starts asking Anoushka about school, her favourite subjects and friends. She combs her hair with slow movements and speaks slowly but her articulation is clear. At one point he asks her what she thinks about people who make fun of her and her friends – and she replies without delay "I ignore them, everyone has their own weaknesses".

Ahmed whispers to me again: “she is bright, there is nothing wrong with her” and then to the agency women in English so Anoushka’s mother does not understand: “This is your call, but if I were you I wouldn’t do it.” There is a contemplative silence and they look into space. We find out from her mother she was diagnosed with mild retardation and learning difficulties when she was about two. They discuss once the mother leaves the room again about a possibility of finding another girl for the story but there is no model they can find for the afternoon. Ahmed continues: “Think of it, Anoushka is a winner, but think of her next to Farzana”. Farzana was another character, a blind woman excelling in her job with the company and learning to be a computer programmer. Ahmed described her as educated and articulate and visually ideal because her disability was visible.

There is not much enthusiasm in the room despite the tea and, to buy time to find a resolution, Anoushka is told to play the harmonium. She sits next to the window for natural light and she is photographed. She accompanies the music by singing some Tagore lyrics and although I am not clear of the precise meanings I understand the emotional importance and literary beauty his works represent. The advertising agency women are preoccupied in thought.



Photograph 16 – Anoushka performing. ©Author



Photograph 17 – Anoushka and her mother in front of the house. ©Author

After a diplomatic departure and a few mandatory shots outside the garden, Ahmed reviews the pictures in his viewfinder and I ask what the final conclusion is to this dilemma. ‘The problem is that she is not *so* physically disabled’: I press on further and notice his irritation. “This city is full of people doing incredible things, like a man with one leg running 3000 miles, who I could be taking pictures of”, he retorts and walks away. I know to stop questioning at this point.

Once back in the car, they discuss the situation and agree Anoushka was not strong enough visually. The designer also feels strongly: “she looked good - she even had her eyebrows done”. However the only option considering the tight deadline is to visit her school the following day and get some pictures with her friends, some of whom do have Down’s syndrome, playing badminton to complete the story.

Scene 2: The School Shoot

The school is a gated two-story building with a large tree providing shade in the school yard. We arrive at 9:30AM and students between the ages of 8-15 are gathered in the schoolyard, while their mothers sit in the shade. Ahmed tells me he is going to observe how the children move and I follow. The students mill around the gates, some come and speak to him. I approach Ahmed to ask him what he thinks – “I don’t normally work with disabled children and am learning how they move. They move in a very different manner with a different timing”.

Anoushka is beaming when she sees Ahmed and she introduces us to her two badminton friends. One of them was a tall, slim girl, with an infectious smile. Her facial expressions are pronounced and she says she is ready to play. She has just fetched her racket. The second friend is a shorter girl who has Down’s syndrome. She is shy and follows Anoushka and her other friend diligently. The advertising agency women and Ahmed silently motion to each other and nod. I understand that this girl with Down’s syndrome girl is necessary to the shoot.



Photograph 18 – Anoushka with her friends. ©Author



Photograph 19 –Anoushka in action. ©Author



Photograph 20 – Anoushka’s opponent. ©Author

The girls play badminton and we film. Children mill around the make-shift badminton court and they are not told what to do or how to pose. Ahmed lets them enjoy their game and is ready for when they are in position. Individual shots of them are taken hitting the shuttlecock and portraits are taken of the girls together and the story of the girl with Down’s syndrome is recorded with portraits of her and her mother. At the end of the shoot the agency women remark that the pictures were good. They weren’t intrusive and everything flowed naturally, precisely according to the requirements, with enough material to work from. I ask how Ahmed thinks the day went. His reply is a short, ‘fine’. I ask how shooting with disabled children was different than normal shoots, again a succinct reply: “Not at all, I just became a five-year old in my mind and it was fine.”

5.3.5 After the Shoot

Working with Ahmed was a different experience to working with other photographers, so the designer later told me. His style of pictures was naturalistic and he had an engaging way of communicating with people and making them feel relaxed. This seemed to show in the images: they were not polished and the people had natural expressions. Ahmed's approach was to make a connection with the people first before he shot any film and also to use maximum natural lighting. Both approaches suited the project aims.

5.4 Case Study Three: The Girls' Education Programme Assignment

This section presents Case Study Three, a one-day follow-up assignment for Reading Room, the same international educational charity described in Case Study One. The location is in the Northern river delta region of Sirajganj and I am the commissioned photographer.

5.4.1 Introduction to Assignment

Bangladesh Country Office

Dhanmondi, Dhaka, 27 January 2011

I sit in the middle of the large office with staff members working quietly at their stations. I ask the Country Director about the feedback from the case study last year (Case Study One). After a thoughtful silence as if to recall which it was, he replies without addressing my question directly.

"This will be good for your research. I just got an email from HQ communications department in the US and she was satisfied with the photographer we used. She said, whoever you are using - he is great. But I often find the problem is that they have the same style and they don't go beyond the limits."

I inquire "so you mean to say they give you the same pictures?"

"Yes, they have an image in their mind of what we want and they produce it. When I first saw him [Saikat, the photographer in Case Study One] working, he was trying to find the right angle by climbing on chairs to get the right angle. You could tell that he really takes care and his heart is in it"

At that point one of the project coordinators interrupts and asks something in Bangla to which Zaki continues in English:

"Where will she be tomorrow? In school?"

"Yes" she replies.

"Can we go against our educational policy and ask the teacher to take her out of school for two sessions?"

"OK, no problem"

"And then go home with her – do we need home shots?"

"I will check" and she leaves.

Leaning back in his swivel chair with his hands crossed over his stomach he swings around to face me again: "What are you doing tomorrow?" I smile and he continues.

"Ruhi [the project coordinator] is going to a field site tomorrow for a documentation project and you can go with her. You can go, but I want your pictures". Without waiting for my answer he turns to Ruhi "Interview her, but not like a researcher, talk to her and then write later"

The white van picks me up the next morning from my hotel.

5.4.2 Background Information

The assignment location is in the Char (island) area of Bangladesh near the town of Sirajganj in central Bangladesh. The beneficiary and her family have been identified by the charity as 'vulnerable'. The populations of these islands move annually from their temporary land holdings due to the erosion of the land by the Jamuna River and are considered one of the most remote and disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh.

This family is supported by the charity's girls' education support programme which provides financial support for school fees and transportation to encourage the education of girls. This assignment is a follow-up story, with text and images of the beneficiary girl for a donor report which showcases individual stories from the countries the charity operates in. It is to include quotes and the opinions of the beneficiary girls, members of her family and community.

The beneficiary girl's name is Fuara. She has been supported by the Charity for the last few years so she is able to continue school and not leave to support the family or get married as is often the case. She was featured in the 2009 Report of the Girls' Education Yearbook. This assignment will be to collect the follow up story and images to be used for the 2011 report for which Ruhi will write the story and I will take the pictures. I am shown the last publication which includes pictures and the impressions of the girl. The description of her reads:

‘The first quality one notices about Fuara is her shyness. It’s difficult to make eye contact, but once you break down the initial barriers, you’re treated to her large, contemplative, chocolate colored eyes and glimmering smile.’ (2009, p.5)

Shyness exudes from the accompanying images which show Fuara in different poses: carrying books and smiling portraits against colourful backdrops. She looks about twelve years old with round cheeks and a wide smile. Saikat had been the photographer for these images.

5.4.3 The Brief and Events of Filming

28 January 2010

En route to Sirajganj I am aware I am slightly anxious and tense – I recall the restless and expectant behaviour of the photographers from the other shoots I had observed before they entered the field. I am not aware where I am going and what conditions I will have to work. It is clear that the shooting time will be during high sun between the hours of 11 am and 2 pm when lighting conditions are most unfavourable. I also know the Country Director would ideally like something out of the ordinary, but the email from HQ encouraged the same style as I had seen in the previous publications. I decide my aim of the day is to get two or three solid images. I imagine these in my mind’s eye: one, as a good close up portrait with soft light that captures her character, ideally with a colourful backdrop and another of her and her family in their home which would include some objects or background to tell of the environment she lived in. I know our schedule is tight and there is not a lot of time. I feel nervous not having met her before knowing I don’t have choice of subject and wonder how she will react to me. How long it will take for her to relax and trust me?

My aims for the day have been clarified in instructions sent to all of the country offices:

Each country will need to collect the following:

- 500 word first person story from one girl.
- 200 words written in third person. We want where she is now, what she is doing etc. For BD [Bangladesh] the only option is Fuara

Sample template for stories and info to collect as well as draft concept design is attached.

....

Photos! I think it will best to have pictures taken after your initial interview and once we finalise her story because we won’t really know what the story will be about until then. So, you’ll have to make arrangements to have pictures taken of the girl and the five most important people in her life after your first visit and following the first round of story editing. We’ll want to be sure the pictures show the setting, the home of the girl, so we can give readers a clear picture of the girls’ life. For each story, we should work together on agreeing on a specific shot list for the photographer.

For BD, if you need to hire the photographer at the same time, that will be ok given the timing, but please have the photographer take pictures in a documentary style, that tell the story of the girl.

Scene 1 – Meeting Fuara

“Stop here!” Ruhi stops the driver and we enter the school gates. The dusty courtyard is empty and there are listen-and-repeat exercises coming from the classrooms encircling it. We enter the Principal’s office to give our greetings just as the children are let out of the classrooms. The commotion outside grows, the two charity coordinators, Ruhi and another woman we picked up from the regional office, leaving me with the principal. On the way out, Ruhi says to me, take some pictures out there. The principal is a tall lean man in his fifties with large glasses who speaks with authority – he demands my audience although I would like to be scoping the school yard. I am introduced in front of the teenage girls who have congregated at the foot of the principal’s office.

“Say something” he commands me in English and I do briefly which isn’t sufficient. “Something more!” and I try again to be more articulate and speak longer. As I do I notice a younger girl in the front row. She buries her face with her hands as the local coordinator touches her head gently comforting her. I pause in my speech, bring up my camera and take a picture of her without realising my audience’s attention is also taken there and at this point the crowd starts to laugh. It becomes too much and the girl is taken away to be comforted behind the building. That was impulsive and I feel a pang of guilt – I hadn’t realised she was crying and probably shouldn’t have taken the shot of such a moment. It was a split second decision when I had seen emotion and so, reacted instinctively to take advantage of the opportunity. (Photograph 21)

I then enter the courtyard and I can feel the eyes of the crowd following. The path in front of me clears, eyes are on me, but most are too timid to say anything. I rationalise my situation considering the available time I will have to work quickly and ask Ruhi to help me organise a group shot. The girls the charity supports are congregated in front of me and only at that moment I notice ‘my subject’. She timidly stands in the centre of the front row of the group without moving from the place Ruhi directed her to. (Photograph 22)



Photograph 21 – The stolen image. ©Author



Photograph 22 – Portrait of Reading Room Girls. ©Author

Scene 2 – Journey to Fuara's home

Ruhi directs Fuara into the van next to her in the backseat and gives her a small hug. Fuara is clearly nervous: her cheeks are red, she doesn't know where to place her eyes and answers Ruhi's questions with extreme, if forced, politeness, in full sentences. I get a closer look at her when she doesn't notice. Her hair is long and tied in a ponytail and she is wearing a green salwaar kameez with a black shawl. Since the last pictures she had matured to take on more grown up features. I mention to Ruhi that she is very beautiful. "Even though she is very dark, she is beautiful. She has something special" is her reply.

I mentally get ready for the exit from the car and scope the river crossing. The high noon colours are brash and yellow. The light is hazy, the sandbank and shipments of hay make the colours reflect the yellow hues. Fuara's black shawl makes for a stark contrast in the bright light and her skin tone picks up a yellow colour. I worry.

I check the light and run to the front and take some shots, the coordinators are fully engrossed in speaking to her, in front of my lens so I gently push one of them out of the way with one hand. This stops the conversation, which was not my intention. Fuara avoids me but keeps her eyes on Ruhi who continues speaking. Ruhi then stands behind me in an attempt to 'trick' her into looking into my lens and we both find it humorous - even Fuara laughs. (Photograph 23) It is clear I haven't made contact so I retreat to take some river scenes to 'capture the environment'.

It is clear Fuara is shy, she needs time and we haven't made a connection. She is relying on Ruhi for guidance and only faces the camera when Ruhi reassures her. But in those cases the moment is lost and the image speaks to this lack of connection. (Photograph 24)



Photograph 23 – Trying to connect. ©Author



Photograph 24 – Not connecting. ©Author

We arrive on the char (island) and Fuara's younger brother joins us. I notice a stack of firewood with the expanding flat sand island in the background – I am getting slightly nervous because I haven't been able to be alone with her and I understand we have limited time, so I suggest a portrait shot while she is sitting on the stack with her school bag to make her comfortable with the camera. Ruhi says to me – you have to include her brother too, he is feeling left out. So seated diagonally I take some practice shots. The brother is wide-eyed and serious with a refusal to smile although we all, Ruhi, the local project coordinator and I, try and coax one out. (Photograph 25) Fuara notices what we are after and laughs at him and, possibly understanding how she appears, she relaxes. I get a natural pose from her and we walk three miles to her home. We have made a connection. (Photograph 26)



Photograph 25 – Coaxing a response from the serious brother. ©Author



Photograph 26 – Shyness has disappeared. ©Author

Scene 3 – The Home Environment

The village is on sand, with straw houses built without foundations. Fuara's family has two buildings encircling the central courtyard with an outside kitchen in one corner. The livestock are housed in another small straw building. As we enter Ruhi speaks with authority and confidence. She makes an introduction to the mother and father and tells them I will be taking pictures. I scope: the sky has grey hues while there are yellows in the courtyard. The light is harsh and portraits in this light become silhouettes. I am at a loss for what I can do technically so try various angles. I sense this is disrupting Ruhi's interview with the family, but I need some images of her family as the brief requested. (Photograph 27) The crowds grow and gather, and I motion for the people in my lens to get out of the way which they do without hesitation and continue to listen in on the conversation from another position. (Photograph 28)

A quick review of the images show they are not working because of the harsh light and they document the spectacle we have created by our arrival, rather than the everyday scenes of village life as the NGO email requested. I enter a moment of frustration and wander off to brainstorm my choices. There is nothing but sand and straw houses: no greens or reds, or sari's hanging in the sun to dry to make a portrait of Fuara. Ruhi is still engrossed with the task of interviewing which does not make for interesting images. I need action and some sort of engagement.



Photograph 27 – A Family portrait
©Author



Photograph 28 – The interview spectacle. ©Author

I interrupt Ruhi to ask her to request if people could go about their work, a request they take no notice of. Then I ask Ruhi if Fuara could go about her daily tasks as she normally would – like feeding the goats or helping in the kitchen. Without understanding what I am after, she replies, she would normally be in school now but soon realises my problem. Fuara's mother understands the request to which a she fetches a bucket and enters the shed – Fuara stands rigidly next to some villagers and I see her face is red. Ruhi approaches her with the community's eyes following and

asks her to feed the goats while I take pictures. Fuara stands frozen and says nothing and stands in what appears as shock and refusal.

"She doesn't want to do it" I conclude. "Why?"

Ruhi under her breathe "I don't know. I have finished my interview. We need to leave soon. We are attracting too much attention". The shed would have been too dark for pictures anyway.

She does homework then doesn't she? I tell Ruhi we are going in the house for a moment to see her books and get away from the crowds. Her mother swiftly prepares a mat for us where we sit and the school books are placed in front of us. An elderly man sits on the elevated bed in the corner of the house and watches us. It is initially unsettling because he doesn't blink. Fuara does not take notice and only when I raise my concern she says in English says "grandfather".

Ruhi returns with an enthusiastic entrance and sits between us making conversation, telling Fuara we will take some pictures here in the house with her doing homework. Fuara tenses again. I ask her to leave us alone for some while we get to know each other.

We sit on the straw mat combing through her books and she reads for me in English: pronouncing the longer words with extra care and occasionally I help her with the words. I show my pleasure and she seems pleased. Then we turn to the Bangla book which she rambles away at twice the speed and we laugh. Then I open the door to let sun reach her face – with the dark interior of the house, her dark shawl, and the mid-day light – the image is sharp. I ask her to move so the sun reaches her face – and get a natural pose as she concentrates. We both relax and enjoy each other's company. (Photograph 29)

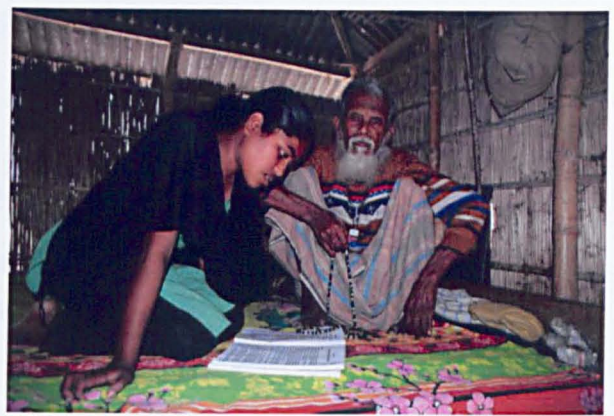
A woman pokes her head in the window of the house and blocks the little light I have streaming in from behind. We laugh at the woman's curiosity, to which I wave my arm to tell her to leave although it is Fuara's request which works. Grandfather has not moved and is still looking in my direction and I suggest Fuara sits beside her grandfather and reads to him. She kneels on the bed facing me. This looks awkward and posed so I motion to her to face her grandfather. She doesn't understand and looks confused, so I physically guide her into position. Grandfather is motionless. She reads a story in her Bangla studies book and I take a picture, with flash, which is abrasive in the dark house we sit in. At this point it is obvious grandfather is blind and cannot see - he still has not blinked. (Photograph 31)



Photograph 29 – Fuara reads for the camera.
©Author



Photograph 30 – Posing in front of her books.
©Author



Photograph 31 – Published Image. ©Author

We emerge from the house and the numbers in the courtyard have increased and remain in dialogue with Ruhi. I sense the family is getting nervous and the mother goes into the kitchen and starts working swiftly, making a fire to prepare dinner and not answering the questions of the villagers who stand around her. The local coordinator reads a book to the children but motions with her eyes we have to go. Our presence is attracting too much attention and they must take care of chores before nightfall. Our goodbyes disperse the crowds with only a few children escorting us back to the boat.

5.4.4 Reflections on the day

My initial concerns were accurate, the light was harsh and the schedule tight. I was not able to achieve my goal of two to three good pictures. On the drive back to Dhaka I felt particular uneasy about the setting up and staging I felt I had to do in order to get some pictures within the time limits, and with the constraints of the harsh sun and surroundings. I mentioned this to Ruhi and she replied without sharing my concern “Well, that is how it was and it shows the harsh conditions they live in”.

Ruhi shared with me the story told to her by Fuara’s father. He had received numerous wedding proposals for Fuara and had rejected all of them. He was determined to keep her in school, as the hope of their family, but rejecting many proposals also looks bad within the community. Our arrival had provided a spectacle and attracted attention to Fuara and her family – and may have put her at risk. On an island without electricity, and with drug use a major problem among young men,

the safety of women was precarious. It is for this reason we were in a hurry to leave and could only hope our presence had not been too disruptive.

5.4.5 Post shoot meeting with the Commissioner

We return to Dhaka after nightfall and meet the Country Director at a BBQ restaurant where a dinner is hosted for managers from Asia and Africa.

"How did it go?", the Country Director says as he passes a cold beer.

"Good, I suppose". The Regional Director office joins our table and the conversation. I explain the challenges of lighting, timing and Fuara's shyness. I continue to explain how she had matured compared with the pictures I had seen of her taken last year. To add to it she was wearing a black scarf and occasionally posed for the camera as a Bollywood star making her more dramatic: "Probably the type of image you are not after?..."

The Country Director laughs: "don't worry - that happens. She must be the most photographed girl in the whole of the upazila [district] and probably of their whole organisation. She has had a lot of practice. We just have to make sure none of the village boys see those pictures, every village boy will fall in love with her and cause major problems". He adds at the end of our discussion: "I am sure the pictures are fine and once they are photo-shopped they will be exactly what are required".

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

The three case studies documented in this chapter provide an insight into the production of the short assignment format which can be described as structured simulation exercises bound by pre-constructed narratives. These assignments offer few choices for independent interpretation or exploration of alternative ways of telling those narratives. The limitations of time and tight schedules ensured this. Particularly with Case Studies One and Three there was a silent hope of the Country Director that alternative imagery could be provided however, with the constraints upon the photographer, the only way to ensure the completion of the assignment was to refer to existing ways of portraying. The subjects for all case studies were enthusiastic to participate although in a capacity which did not infringe on their visions of how they wanted to be represented. The micro-ethical concern of the regulations in Chapter 4 were not an issue on these assignments, negotiating for access and disclosing photographer's intentions and what was expected of the subjects was inferred from the context, by arriving with the charity and advertising agency staff. The next chapter presents a lengthier documentary assignment requesting imagery in the human interest

story format which poses some more complex considerations and opportunities, ethically and aesthetically.

The data from the three case studies presented in this chapter is discussed in conjunction with Case Study Four in detail in Chapters 7 and 8. The analysis of the ethnographic documentation is guided by the three conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity and how these are reflected in decisions made in the field.

Chapter 6

Documentary Assignment: Case Study Four

6.1 Introduction to the Assignment

This chapter presents Case Study Four, an extensive five-day photo shoot for an international development charity, Christian Assistance Service (referred to as CAS)⁴⁸. The location of this case study was the Barisal Division of Southern Bangladesh which is shown in Figure 1. Bangladesh is a low lying region of alluvial flat plains with the two great rivers, Brahmaputra and Ganges joining together into the river Meghna to form the Ganges Delta which empties into the Bay of Bengal. Set in the vast networks of rivers, most parts of the country are less than 12 metres above sea level which results in many low lying areas becoming submerged regularly during the rainy season. The vast amount of sediment carried by the rivers is deposited along the delta and this alluvial soil has created some of the most fertile plains in the world. As a result of natural calamities, including tropical cyclones, tornadoes, and tidal bores occurring almost every year, the landscape continuously changes form, resulting in population movement approximately every two generations due to these shifts.



Figure 1 - Map of Bangladesh and the Ganges Delta, Patuakali District in the Barisal Division is shown boxed. (Source: World Maps 2011)

⁴⁸ Pseudonyms are used in this case study as requested by the photographer.

The region was affected by a humanitarian catastrophe on 15 November 2007 when Cyclone Sidr struck the southern coast of Bangladesh. According to figures provided by the humanitarian news site, AlertNet, 8.5 million people were affected, a third of whom needed emergency assistance. The devastation included: over 1.4 million homes destroyed or damaged, at least 1.25 million livestock killed, 2 million acres of cropland damaged and many miles of Roads and coastal embankments destroyed (AlertNet, 2008).

The response to the cyclone was both local and international generating relief projects immediately after the crisis as well as longer term aid investment to rebuild the livelihoods of the region's inhabitants. This included a number of reconstruction, infrastructure development projects and disaster prevention work which was still ongoing in the region during the time of my fieldwork. It was also during this period that local and international media and humanitarian agencies travelled on location to document the crisis.

6.1.1 The Commissioning Organisation

The commissioner for this assignment was an international humanitarian agency linked with Christian communities across the United States. Its original mandate during World War II focussed on the resettlement of war refugees in Europe, however since then it has evolved into a global organisation which supports emergency and long-term development programmes on all continents including in 18 countries in Asia. In 2009 their annual programming expenditure exceeded 700 million USD with one-eighth coming from private donations and the remainder from USAid, the United States government aid arm. The organisation implements their programmes in the country of operation through strategic partnerships with local charity Christian organisations. This is the also the method in Bangladesh, where the implementing organisation is a local Christian organisation affiliated with churches across the country. It is one of the oldest NGOs in Bangladesh which started its relief and rehabilitation activities just after Independence in 1972 when a cyclone hit the coastal areas of the country. It has become a well-known and trusted organisation among the local population and CAS programmes include two long-term livelihood development programmes and disaster reduction programmes in the Southern region of Bangladesh, both of which were started in 2007 after Cyclone Sidr.

The photographer was commissioned to document these programmes and to show how the lives of their beneficiaries had been impacted by the disaster and consequently improved by the charity programmes. This was a five-day assignment which allowed for more in-depth research and the format was designed as a series of human interest stories. Compared to the short assignments in Chapter 5, this assignment was extensive, covering multiple types of programmes, in numerous locations and photographing various events. The commission requested strong personalised images documenting the lives of multiple beneficiaries and recording their individual stories.

6.1.2 The Photographer

The initial meeting with Ahmed was over an interview a week before departure on this assignment. In the beginning of the interview he was reserved and answered my questions belligerently – yes and no answers to some of my obviously presented open questions. He sat on the backrest of his sofa in his flat which doubled as a small scale exhibition space, and I sat on the sofa. This gave him an upper hand and it soon became clear he needed to have control of the session. He was forty-something with greying hair and had thick glasses and inset eyes. He rarely made eye contact with me and came across as someone who kept his distance strategically and delayed giving someone his trust. After some time he spoke about his own work and how his life in Gulshan (where he lives now), a suburb housing the embassies and the wealthy sections of society, differs from where he grew up in central Dhaka in an area next to railway tracks. His education and experience has been mainly in Bangladesh and he was noticeably proud about his Bangladeshi past, especially when comparing himself with the Western-educated Bangladeshi photographers. He only relaxed in my presence after I had interrupted him rather rudely in mid-sentence, when we both began to speak – as if it were a battle for control. At that point it was as if he, for the first time, became truly involved in the conversation. I came to the conclusion he was a man who appreciated directness so I asked to join him in his next shoot. He thought about it and said he was leaving in a few days but needed to confirm this with the commissioner. It surprised me greatly that he allowed me to join him and I concluded that, despite his bluntness and defensiveness, there was an air of honesty about him and he commanded my respect.

The commissioned assignment was for five days shooting. He had twice previously filmed in the region on personal projects documenting the people of the outlying regions, one time before the

Cyclone Sidr 2007 and one time during the emergency aid work. Therefore he was knowledgeable about the geography and history of the area although this was his first assignment with this charity in the region.

6.1.3 Briefing Session

We knock on large steel gates to the entrance of the Christian Mission of Barisal and are greeted by a security guard. Once in the court yard the van engine is turned off and we climb out of the van. There is a piercing sound of silence after Dhaka, the diesel engine ferry, and the van engine. We are led to the office where we meet Father James who is seated behind a desk with a whiteboard behind him. The white board reads in capital letters:

RICKSHAWS

SEWING MACHINES

COWS

FISHING NETS

BARBER EQUIPMENT

He has a friendly smile and appears to be in the middle of administrative duties with papers in disarray and two calculators on his desk. Father James works for the Christian ministry in Barisal and assists in coordinating the charity projects in the region. Beyond the initial get-to-know-you questions, he asks me, "What donor are you with?" Ahmed is his usual short-worded self and quick to take control of situation: he answers on my behalf – she is my assistant, so let's get down to business. Father James' smile disappears for a moment as he searches for the shooting plan and explains the various projects which are to be documented and discusses the most suitable areas to film. The staff have been notified of our arrival in advance and are happy to work with us. The shooting plan is detailed and divided into daily activities but he warns us that travel distances are long and access difficult. Ahmed replies, "Don't worry, I want you to take me into the most vulnerable areas. We will go anywhere we need to. I can walk through water and waste" and makes it clear he wants to see the place as it normally is and not be given a polished view. Father James' expression says he doesn't like the inference that Ahmed made and he goes on to say with a diplomatic smile "We will try to cooperate with you to reach our interests". On that note we leave, say our goodbyes and this is the last time we see Father James.

As we walk to lunch Ahmed is disgruntled: "see how they treated you just because you were a foreigner and the questions they asked you: which donor are you with?! They immediately assume you are the important one because you are a Westerner and did you see the show they put on in your account! That happens all the time – it is so typical. They like to control everything and that is not the way I work." I ask Ahmed if he read the brief and he says no. "They want positive stories,

but everything cannot be positive. I am not worried about this. They [the beneficiaries] have gotten a cow, they will be happy. There is no question".

6.1.4 The Three Programmes

The shooting brief provided by Father James outlined the three projects which were to be documented. As this was an extensive assignment there were numerous locations for shooting, and our schedules were planned to coincide with the events taking place. This case study documents two of the three projects:

The Cash for Work Programme: a programme which recruits vulnerable communities for road-building and other infrastructure maintenance projects in exchange for wages. This is particularly helpful during seasons with little agriculture work.

The Livestock Donation Programme: a programme which identifies vulnerable families and donates calves or goats to provide milk for personal use and additional income from the sale of milk.

The brief we were given did not include instructions for images but gave the photographer room for interpretation and the freedom to select the case studies which he deemed were most suitable. The brief however, did provide some questions for the photographer to use when writing the case studies and requested information that would assist the charity to write captions. These instructions are reproduced in the chapter.

6.1.5 Day One: The Cash for Work Project

The cash for work site is a project separate to the disaster reduction programme and is based on a model which has been used for numerous years. The union of Lalua which is located south of the Barisal Division was considered to be one of the worst affected by Cyclone Sidr. The government had originally built the 7600 feet length of elevated road but without maintenance it had collapsed during the annual rainy season. The project's aim was to raise and reinforce the road which connected five villages who used it for daily transport. In addition, it provided a safe elevated passage to the cyclone shelter should flooding occur.

There were 320 people working on this project site: 202 male and 118 female. Most of the workers were wage labourers, working on temporary construction or agriculture work, with 90% of them

classified as 'ultra-poor'. This was defined by the charity as people with less than 0.05 – 0.1 acres of arable land; without a house to live in; or, divorced, widowed and/or with no adult children to look after them. They were paid 400 Taka⁴⁹ for three days of work dependent on their attendance on all three days. The projects were generally run in the months of January, February and March during the 'lean' season, a period where jobs in agriculture were scarce and the project was aimed at providing additional income through this difficult period. It was especially beneficial for women who were unable to travel long distances for work to find wage labour jobs due to their responsibilities at home.

The brief from the charity commissioner reads:

1. The cash for work site, understand the context and talk to a couple of women and men workers and get the information – what would have happened, if they did not get this employment opportunity during this lean season, what did they do in the last lean season and how is this different?
2. Also, ask - how this activity (a road or embankment repair work) can help them? What would have happened if this road was not there or if [the charity] had not constructed the road?
3. Portrait of beneficiary while working in different ways and smiling faces.

Scene 1: Making an Entrance

Union of Lalua, 6 March 2010

We enter the site on the back of a motorcycle taxi, the only motorised method of getting around this region. After the two ferry crossings, we travel through small villages weaving through potholes, passing market stalls, fields and plantations along a network of elevated roads. I arrive first just before 9 AM at the meeting point of the work-for-cash site at an intersection in the road. It is a misty morning and the air is damp. I am greeted by a gentleman in a crisp white baseball cap and a Hawaiian floral shirt who says he has been waiting and introduces himself as the project coordinator. I say hello, notice five men approaching from the village who are the work committee members. I say since we lost the photographer, we can do formal introductions once he arrives.

⁴⁹ 400 BDT is approximately 3.35 GBP

Ahmed has a tendency to see something and take a detour so his behaviour is familiar to me and in line with his continuous mission of “I need to get fringe shots”.

From the distance across the fields there is a slowly emerging image through the mist: groups of people, some with children on their shoulders and some carrying tools and baskets. Ahmed arrives soon after and jumps off the back of the motorcycle with his two backpacks full of kit. Eyes are on him and he takes the lead. After introductions, the project coordinator presents the complaint box: a red mailbox tied to a tree at the intersection with slips of paper and a pencil tied to a string. Ahmed is too occupied with the camera settings to take much notice and I compensate with my attention. We are led up a path towards the actual work site while being given a description of the programme.

The working day begins at 9AM and this is the second day of the three day project. The following day salaries will be paid. I understand from the shooting brief we will be following the process of work, receiving payment and going shopping to see the benefits of the programme in action.

In the middle of the presentation, we hear the thump of Ahmed’s backpack dropping in the middle of the road and turn to see him sprint off to the direction we came from, leaping down the embankment towards a silhouette of a man and child in the distance. They enter into his view and stop for him. (Photograph 32) We watch the moment with committee members smiling and the interrupted coordinator adjusting his baseball cap and checking his paperwork. Ahmed picks up his backpack from where he left it and our induction tour continues with a slightly more hesitant group of committee members.



Photograph 32 – A worker arriving with his son ©Author

We are shown the site (Photograph 33): a one kilometre piece of elevated road which goes from the main road to a madrasa⁵⁰ which during crises serves as a community centre and cyclone shelter. The purpose is to strengthen it by digging earth, carrying it to the road, and pounding it to form a solid structure. We are also shown the make-shift toilet set up, especially for the privacy of the women we are told, and a day shelter with four banana tree pillars holding an awning. (Photograph 34) It serves as a day care centre for the smallest children and lunchtime shade. The

⁵⁰ Islamic faith schools which deliver of education and community centre activities in rural areas.

silhouette of workers arriving from the distance and the blow of the whistle marks the beginning of the work day.



Photograph 33 – The work site ©Author



Photograph 34 – The day shelter under construction ©Author

Scene 2

“come and see what she is eating!” Ahmed yells to me. The woman sitting in the shade of the trees laughs and with her mouth full offers me some to taste. We take a few shots and after his banter with the workers, turns to me: “There are no good shots from this morning. I need to get good portraits”

“What about case studies?” I ask.

He then turns to a man sitting next to a haystack. We move towards the man and take pictures, the light is ideal and the man remains unaffected by the attention. (Photograph 35) He has a kind face.

“I think he is a good case study” I agree and ask if he got his story: “not yet but this is one possible case study character”.



Photograph 35 – A potential case study: Man from the work site ©Author

The day tent is full of lunchtime activity: people pushing through to find shaded seats on the ground, children being fed, some comforting the smaller ones all the while glancing over at Ahmed.

He scopes the tent with the committee members closely behind him, watching his movements.(Photograph 36)

Ahmed then enters and sits down in front of a woman who is feeding two children simultaneously, each one sat on either knee and fully engrossed in the task. Her position looks awkward and somewhat theatrical. (Photograph 37) He asks her to turn around – giving him better light and she continues feeding. “I noticed her before” he says to me. She has animated features, a solid build with her hair tied in a bun. From behind his viewfinder Ahmed calls to me “four children, lives with sister-in-law, no husband, gone to work elsewhere” He gets her name: Khalida.



Photograph 36 – Scoping for case studies ©Author



Photograph 37 – Meeting Khalida. ©Author

Sitting next to Ahmed is an older woman, with her eyes downcast and not looking at the commotion next to her. Her heavy composure is in stark contrast with the violet coloured sari she is wearing. Ahmed turns to her with his camera pointing but doesn't shoot, and instead takes his eyes from the viewfinder and waits for the woman to look up. She eventually does and raises her head as consent – and he then takes a few close up portraits (Photograph 38), after which he puts down the camera and starts talking with her. Akimunesa points out her grandchildren from the crowd and her daughter who is comforting a baby, about five months old. Next to her is her eldest grandchild, a pre-teen boy who has been watching the interaction and is fascinated by Ahmed and his equipment. He has big observant eyes and a cheerful exterior, Ahmed half-jokes half-rebukes: why aren't you in school! Akimunesa lets out a subdued smile as she glances at her grandson and confirms they live together just across the field. “We'll follow them home later” states Ahmed.



Photograph 38 – Approaching Akimunesa ©Author

Scene 3

Before the whistle blows to mark the end of the day's work we stand near the spot where people from our case studies are working. Khalida has spurts of energy and swift movements as she digs the earth and fills baskets for people to deliver, occasionally hollering for people to move quicker. Akimunesa is squatted next to the road and pounds solid the newly carried earth with a wooden baton. Her daughter has steady movements as she carries earth baskets on her shoulder; occasionally stopping to glance at her baby in the day shelter. Ahmed comes to speak with me and tells me that a committee member had just pulled him aside and asked him where the pictures will go.

"so what did you say?"

"They will go to America and people will decide if this project will be continued. That is what they want, for the project to continue. I also told him that if people come here taking pictures, you must always ask them three questions: why they are taking pictures and for whom, and what purpose will they be used. This would make it difficult for others in the future, but they should know their rights"

"Has it been easy to get the pictures?"

"There are no good shots from the morning. I need to get portraits, but yes everyone is very willing. I told the committee leader that I thought people weren't taking the job seriously – not working as hard as they would if this was a government commission to reconstruct the road. And he agreed with me." The whistle blows and we are immediately off.

Scene 4

Minara fetches her baby with a worried look on her face. The baby is hungry. She takes the lead for the approximate three kilometre walk across the dry fields to their home which she shares with her brother-in-law's family. It is a family homestead and Akimunesa's house is located next door. She shields the baby from the sun with her dupatta⁵¹. Akimunesa cannot walk as quickly so she

⁵¹ The dupatta is a multi-purpose scarf with the primary use to cover the head and/or any inadvertent cleavage usually worn draped over the chest resting over the shoulders.

strays behind but in the steady flow of labourers all leaving at the same time there is a sharp wind blowing the women's saris- which gives movement to the images and Ahmed takes a few shots. (Photograph 39)



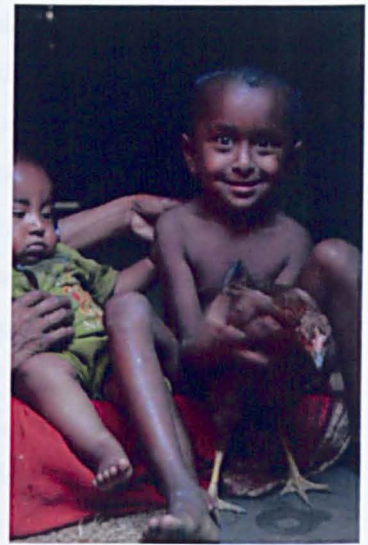
Photograph 39 – The walk home. ©Author

At the house we follow her to a cooking area where she prepares porridge for the baby while her older daughter of twelve takes the baby. (Photograph 40) She sits next to her mother comforting the baby and is keenly aware of the camera: she is clearly posing for us but the sullen expression is quite opposite to the rambunctious entrance she made. She doesn't speak and only rocks the baby.

When complete, Minara swiftly takes the baby and moves into the house, upon which Ahmed follows and asks her to sit in the doorway so he can take advantage of the light to shoot some pictures. The doorway is narrow and I stay back but Ahmed calls for me to join – “the light is fantastic, come and take some shots”. It is a good light and Minara's six-year old daughter joins us with a pet chicken to add to the scene. (Photograph 41) Minara then tells us her story: she has four children, with her eldest daughter being deaf, and her six-year old has developmental problems. Her eldest son has had to take the role of the man in the family as her husband has gone to work in Dhaka and they haven't seen him for years. She has benefited from the charity programmes and the livestock programme in particular. She said that one of the proudest moments in her life was going alone to the cattle fair to pick up a cow, which was given to her as part of this programme.



Photograph 40 – Minara preparing porridge ©Author



Photograph 41 – Sitting in the doorway ©Author

Ahmed asks when the cows are given water and Minara replies: “Now - the kids can take you” and we go. Nine children join and they pose with the water bucket. The older boys are told to kneel in front and the others in the back. They pose stiffly and are told “Don’t look at me – look at what you are doing” and the process is over in five minutes.



Photograph 42 – Feeding the cows ©Author



Photograph 43 – Feeding the cows ©Author

Scene 5

Back at the house, we receive an invitation from the doorway to enter the home of Akimunesa. We enter and sit on one of the beds in the room to see the sight of a thin man in a foetal position on the floor on a blue plastic sheet. He is unable to lift his head for long but glances in our direction for a moment and lets his head fall back on the floor. Akimunesa lets out a command for the children to keep the noise down. The man on the floor is her husband of 43 years who has been paralysed for

the last two years. She looks at him with sadness and kneels down and smooths his hair. She tells of her struggle and how the doctors cannot do anything. He is incontinent and she struggles to find enough energy to care for him. The man then lifts his head and she says "your food is coming" to him while she looks at us with a smile "he is hungry". Minara brings rice and spinach she has prepared and Akimunesa feeds him, wiping the sides of his mouth with her dupatta and we sit motionless in silence. Ahmed then turns to me cautiously, looks me in the eye this time, shaking his head and says "how is it possible for this to be allowed?" He then asks Akimunesa if he can take a few pictures, because people should see this. She complies and looks confused at the question as if to imply that is why she asked us there in the first place. I sit and watch – Ahmed moves slowly, takes a position in the back of the house, and takes three shots in slow succession telling them to keep on eating. Within eye shot of Akimunesa he places some money under some clothes on the bed and taps it. She mouths thank you and we quietly leave.

In the yard Ahmed says, "you didn't take pictures?" I answer no, for the needs of my project I didn't think this necessary. He replies "I had to. This is real. I need to capture what I see. They need to know."

Upon leaving Ahmed pats Minara's son on the back and says: "You are the man of the house now. Be strong and take care of your mother! Right?"

Scene 6

We come across Khalida on the road back to the taxi stand and are invited to her house. She rolls out a straw mat for the kids to sit on and tosses them some World Food Programme cookies (which are distributed at school each day to ensure children are getting their nutritional needs). She fetches text books and flings them onto the mat – yelling at the children to go and do some homework. They do as they are told, some reading and some pretending to read, looking at Ahmed and if he is coming with his camera.

Khalida motions to Ahmed to photograph the scene she has created but Ahmed is not interested. He watches two older girls play hop scotch and Khalida intervenes, telling her niece to sing a song for the visitors. Ahmed then tells the others to sit in a row and clap to support their friend, which they do (Photograph 44). At first the niece seems timid, with her voice cracking but then it transforms. She enjoys the limelight: adding dance moves to her song. After the pictures, we set the cameras down and have a break after the long day. The girl continues singing and I ask about the song. The song tells of a young girl who married a much older man and the sadness of the girl who did not get the type of marriage she was hoping for. Ahmed is pensive and comments ironically "this will probably be the case for her".



Photograph 44 – A dance and song performance ©Author

Reflections after the Shoot on Day 1

At dinner, Ahmed seemed pensive. We sat at the restaurant in candle light with a flashing TV screen in the corner which was connected to a generator. The daily power cuts began at evening prayer time, and I remarked: “it must be dark in the village we were in today since they didn’t have electricity”. Ahmed gave no answer as he stared in the distance. The large screen TV flashed the cricket news following a dancing programme. Ahmed wasn’t watching and was noticeably deep in thought. He said finally after some deliberation, “Law is born when there is abundance – for most it is still a matter of survival”. I asked him how he thought the day went and he nodded.

After the silence over dinner, we spoke. He said it will take him about seven days to get the story he wanted. The long distances, poor roads and the shooting sites spread out in the region was the reason why it would take so long. He explained that although in one day he normally shot 600-1000 images, there were usually only about 20 good ones. He hoped to produce 50 images for the client each shooting day in addition to the story to accompanying them. The clients normally did not establish quotas on images and this time was no different. He also mentioned that in most cases the client used images he never would consider and appreciated ones he did not expect. This was not a normal shoot in the fact that it was so lengthy and according to Ahmed this particular NGO had not documented the activities before, so their expectations were not so precisely defined. This provided Ahmed with freedom to explore with a less prescriptive brief.

6.1.6 Day Two: The Livestock Donation Programme

Description

The livestock donation programme is a project under the livelihoods development mandate of the organisation. It is a programme aimed to give an asset to the most vulnerable families and specifically targets women, especially those with children, those with husbands working away as day labourers, widows, elderly couples without children to care for them and others in vulnerable situations. These beneficiaries were identified by a survey of the region conducted by the Programme Coordinators. This programme is a donation programme, unlike the cash for work exchange programme, where beneficiaries are given one calf. The charity ensures that calves are healthy through a staff veterinarian and the initial vaccinations are provided for the first two years after which the responsibility lies with the new owner. A calf's value is approximately 10,000 Taka⁵² and will provide future returns in terms of offspring and in milk, making this a valuable asset. The day's programme has been planned to the charity's schedule: in the morning we will visit a voucher exchange meeting and in the afternoon we will follow up with the cash for work site of the previous day.

An excerpt from the day's shooting brief:

Visit the families and get to know their livelihood context in the form of a case study.

- 1. Location, context, showing the disaster vulnerability of the people living in that Union**
- 2. Photo of the voucher distribution process to the beneficiaries.**
- 3. Photo/portrait (smiling) of one or two beneficiaries and story of what they lost during Cyclone Sidr and what do they understand about the voucher: what she/he is going to shop on the next day; why does this family choose to have this asset (cow); how is it going to help them in living a life.**

⁵² 10,000 BDT is approximately 76 GBP

Scene 1

Gondamari Village, 7 March 2010

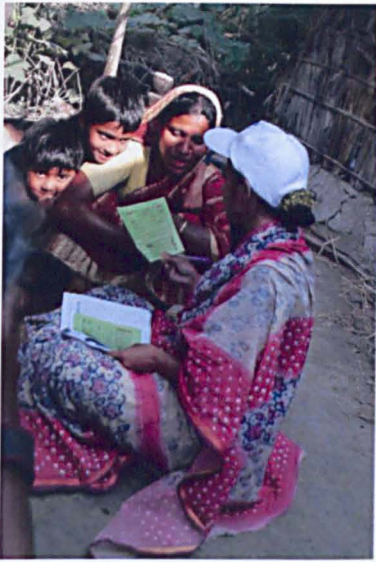
An older woman in the doorway of her house watches us walk past her house with a group of villagers following. The curiosity of the community has peaked and Ahmed walks quickly, scoping the area and, I suspect, trying to disperse the crowds following him. People make comments about this camera, how big and how much does it cost - and he doesn't respond, offers no eye contact or communication. He focuses on a woman working in the edge of the field; until he finally speaks out "everyone get on with your work, do what you normally do and I will come and take a picture of each of you separately!"

Making his way past the old woman's house again she is still in the same position and this time says: what will you give us? Ahmed replies: you are getting a cow aren't you? She says yes - and Ahmed continues, taking a slightly hostile tone: "and it seems to me you have a solar panel on your roof and a large screen TV". She replies without hesitation: "you sleep in concrete, look at where I sleep!" Her house is straw with aluminium panel roofing with a solar panel.

"What was that?" I nudge Ahmed who seems annoyed. He acknowledges the danger that if one senior member is not willing to participate it may make others more hesitant to do so. He suspects that the negative comments come with this programme because there is no fair exchange principle - they receive a cow without payment or work in exchange and this "makes people greedy". There is little value for what they are given. "Has anyone ever gotten hostile with you?" I ask. "Never" is his answer.

The project coordinator is a woman called Soniya, a Bangladeshi woman who had worked with the charity in the region for many years. She wears a signature white baseball cap, making her easy to spot in the distance. She asks Ahmed what he needs and does not interfere during the day, only answering questions when he asks them. She is patient with the photo sessions of the voucher exchange⁵³ when the image is not satisfactory, sometimes presenting the green slip of paper numerous times to the beneficiaries for Ahmed to get the shot right. (Photograph 45)

⁵³ The process involves checking identification, explaining the terms of the programme and the distribution of a voucher to the families who will be participating at the cattle fair the following day.



Photograph 45 – Soniya presenting vouchers ©Author



Photograph 46 – Soniya checking identification ©Author

Scene 2

“Ki koren?” Without a hello, he asks a woman in the courtyard what she is doing. It was obvious she had heard the earlier altercation and she answers without stopping her work. She is sorting the bushels of lentils which are dried in the sun before collection. As Ahmed takes a few shots, her daughter Sumanya races into the frame and snuggles against her mother’s leg sucking her thumb and glancing upwards to the lens.

She whispers to her mother that she is hungry. Ahmed overhears this and says: “go make your daughter some breakfast and we’ll join you”. We go around the back of the house to the outdoor cooking space and lean against the foundations as Sumanya’s mother lights the fire and prepares a plate of rice. As she is cooking she speaks of her situation and how they have been designated to receive a cow, which they are excited about. Her husband had an accident a few years ago and broke his leg which, due to lack of medical services, never healed properly and he is now unable to work now. Sumanya is their only child.

It is a family scene, in which he asks the women of the family to sit around the cooking area. As they do they are arranged in position and he takes a few shots, commenting to me during the process “this is set up, but not set up”. Sumanya’s grandmother stiffens as the camera shifts to her and Ahmed encourages: “smile, relax”. Without an improvement he puts down the camera and says to the grandmother “why are you so serious?” She responds – “how can we smile in a situation like this, we are trying to show respect”. He gives up and we continue visiting other families whose stories Ahmed records in his notebook.

Scene 3

Preparing to leave for the next shooting sight I casually ask Ahmed if he has seen the man in chains? "No, where is he? Show me"

The older man sits on a coconut tree log wearing a lungi⁵⁴ and has a chain attached to his ankle which is nailed to a tree. He is mumbling to himself and pointing off into the distance. His wife is alerted to the fact we are watching him and she comes out with chairs and tells us his story. He had undergone several surgeries and as a result developed a serious mental disorder. He has the tendency to wander and causes great worry for his wife and children.

The man then becomes silent and nods off to sleep in a seated position. The wife gives him a swift punch on the arm and yells "wake up!" Ahmed says "watch out, let him sleep!" The audience has gathered and they laugh – and the wife replies: "he will not sleep now, he keeps me awake at night so I can wake him up now". She motions for us to take his picture and Ahmed moves to the side for better light. He waits and watches. (Photograph 47) The man continues mumbling to which Ahmed calls me over to explain:

"this is a choice photographers have – this would be a great shot: we take his picture with him in chains. But some photographers who want a better one would pull up his lungi over his knees so we can see his thin legs. If you feel that is unethical, then all you have to do is wait. Wait for him to do it himself and be ready for the shot. It's a waiting game"

⁵⁴ A lungi is a traditional garment worn around the waist by men.



Photograph 47 – Lesson on waiting
©Author

In the audience is a stunning girl with light brown eyes wearing a red sari carrying a baby which is no older than two months. After a few shots with the man, he approaches her and takes some close ups muttering over his shoulder to me: “This is her baby - don’t tell me there is no child marriage in this area!” He then goes to show the picture to her on his camera: one of the first times I have seen him do that. Previously he has reprimanded me for doing so. Battery life was a priority.



Photograph 48 – Young girl in the crowd ©Author



Photograph 49 – A view in the viewfinder ©Author

Scene 5: Afternoon at the Cash for Work Site

Photo and text (can be developed as a case study)

1. Payment process – how the beneficiaries get their wages, how much per day, how much she/he got paid, shoot the job card, shoot how they receive the payment and how staff pay the wages.

2. Ask one or two workers – what are they going to do with the money they received today (collect a list of things they are willing to purchase); ask what would have happened today if she/he did not receive the payment.

For the salary distribution there are more people from the charity present and clearly staff from a more senior level. They are identifiable by their crisply ironed collared shirts and by the way they regularly check their mobile phones while their subordinates in white baseball caps organise the crowd into manageable single-file queues to speed up the process of salary distribution.

The formalities are processed: signing and fingerprinting and large amounts of small denominations are counted. Minara, Khalida and Akimunesa collect their money and we head home together. They carry the smaller children on their hips, buckets which held their lunch and drinking water for the day across the rice fields. The wind picks up and their colourful saris blow in the wind. Some shots from behind are taken which capture the flat, dry landscape.

The conversation on the journey home reveals that the children Khalida said were hers are in fact her nieces. She has lost track of her daughter after she married and her husband has moved away, leaving her at her sister-in-law's house. From the distance across the rice field we hear children screaming and it is the older children running towards their mother and grandmother with delight – leaping across the field. The girl leading the pack is a girl in a bright red dress which contrasts with the dry rice fields and provides some scenic shots which Ahmed takes advantage of. (Photograph 50) Ahmed moves in behind them and suggests to the children “why don't you hold hands” (Photograph 51)



Photograph 50 – Arrival of the children ©Author



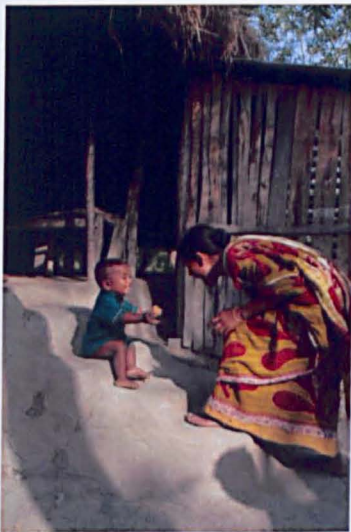
Photograph 51 – Under Ahmed's direction ©Author

Ahmed takes multiple shots as he says to me “ this is exactly what they [the charity] want, this is a good picture” The kids are having fun doing this, fully aware Ahmed is taking pictures as he chases them from behind. We then cut across the elevated road as a shortcut across the field and

we come across a herd of sheep and, just as before, the girl in the red dress gathers her three friends. They hold hands as they chase the herd with Ahmed running close behind.

Scene 6

The first stop-over en route to the market place is Minara's house and we rest in the shade of the trees in the courtyard as they prepare for the shopping trip which Ahmed has organised with the case studies. Our wait grows into an extended period of time and I start to suspect something is not right. Everyone has disappeared and I ask what is going on – "they are supposed to join us and I have no idea". Ahmed's concern also peaks and he starts asking people through the doorway what is happening and telling them that if we are going to the market place we want to reach there before the shops close. There is some hesitancy until Minara comes out with plastic bottles for filling with mustard oil and cooking oil. We continue to Khalida's house with Akimunesa following us with a slower pace. At Khalida's house the children are gathered in the courtyard, sitting on a straw mats again, writing in their notebooks. The youngest of the children is with Khalida who is throwing a ball, putting on a performance for him to make him laugh - a contagious laugh with which provides some images with soft evening light.(Photograph 52)



Photograph 52 – Khalida playing with her nephew ©Author



Photograph 53 – Khalida presenting her cows ©Author

Again, there seems to be no urgency to go to the market and Khalida leaves to bathe in the pond next door and then announces she must take care of her cows. She has two, both of which were received through the same charity's livestock programme, each from different years. So we follow her to the paddock and she introduces her cows, speaks to them lovingly, and rinses their faces with cool water she carried from the pond. She scratches them, hugs them and picks out ticks before she poses with them.(Photograph 53) She says they are like her own children.

On our arrival back to the house a group of women are waiting as if there is a problem. We are not told of the reason until Khalida, in her usual direct style, tells Ahmed as she walks by that she is not going to the market. We piece the story together and realise that she is hesitant about going to

the market because she has no money left: she has borrowed money from the loan sharks, neighbours and shopkeepers who have now descended on pay day to collect their money. We decide to leave, but then Khalida changes her mind and apparently has managed to borrow some more money. Eventually our entourage leaves and is made up of three adults and eight children including the babies. The girl in the red dress, who sang for us the day before, is fascinated by Ahmed and struggles to keep up with him. She skips along and as we pass neighbours' houses she yells "uncle is going to buy me all the rice I can eat!" Ahmed clarifies "I am not going to buy you all the rice you can eat, I will buy you some sweets. That's the agreement" and she seems pleased.

Scene 8

The market place is male dominated with men hanging outside the various stalls selling rice, vegetables and other foodstuffs. Each of the case study women frequent different stalls remaining loyal to whichever shopkeeper gives them credit. Khalida walks up to her shop and Ahmed takes shots of the transactions, the measuring of rice, the mustard oil and other goods she buys. The crowd congregates and pushes in – with Minara's eldest son acting as guard and pushing people back. They crowd around and Ahmed politely asks them to get back and give him space. The crowds follow and make comments –Khalida is unbothered, as are the children.

The next stall is where pictures are taken of Minara and her mother, Akimunesa, shopping. At this end of the market the crowds have multiplied and they get slightly more intrusive. Men, some intentionally and some unintentionally, come into the frame, pushing their friends in as a joke and putting their faces in. Comments fly around such as: "look he's selling our poverty again" and "he's going to make a lot of money with those pictures". At this stage Ahmed loses his temper and yells for the crowd to shut up and mind their own business, following which a momentary silence descends and Minara looks embarrassed. The crowd murmur picks up again and we leave quickly after heading for the tea shop. On our way, Ahmed comes to find me fuming: "It's because of you that they don't take me seriously".

I don't respond and we have tea in silence with our three case study participants. His comment could very well be true. Later in the evening he reflects that he may have over-reacted at the market place and I accept his indirect apology.

6.1.7 Day Three: The Cattle Distribution Programme

The assignment continues at sunrise and the day's schedule is loosely outlined and vetted in the back of the cycle-rickshaw by Ahmed. The important images to get today concern three particular events: the transporting of livestock across the river to the market, the cattle fair and its activities and returning home with the cows to the previous day's village of Gondamari to record the reactions of the families.

The directive from the shooting plan states:

Visit the Livestock Fair and then go with one beneficiary to her house, see what s/he does with the new cow that she or he received. Select those beneficiary/ies, who have children with them.

Shoot (photo as described below)

How staff are organized, how cow health check ups are done, portrait of staff while working.

How particular beneficiaries chooses his/her cows. Why she has chosen that particular cow, has she ever purchased a cow by her own choice?

Go with that particular beneficiary and shoot what she does she when she takes the cow at her home, what is her feeling, has she kept any food ready for the cow, how does she plan to care for the cow, how is this going to make a difference in her life?

If there is any child in the family, how does that child feel? Is the child going to give a name to the cow? (shoot portrait)

Scene 1

The market square is a flat dusty field with no shade. The fair is due to begin at noon and temperatures are still rising. It is a hot, dry day with restless cattle making the dust rise. There is a group of women sitting in the middle of the field, all of them holding green voucher coupons with which they try and shield the sun. A man in white baseball caps holds a loudspeaker and makes an announcement for all beneficiaries to sit. He reports: "This cow you are about to receive is not from [the implementing charity]. It has been given to you from the government of America and the American people". Ahmed circles the group and takes some shots from different angles. The charity coordinator continues to explain the events of the day – groups will be called out, after which they will get the opportunity to choose their cow, proceed to the veterinarian who will check the health of the cow, which will be followed by the contract signing. At the end of his speech he reiterates: "if you do not want the cow you don't have to take it. If you do, it is yours and completely your responsibility".

Soniya waves when she sees me from the checkout stand with an enthusiastic smile and her white cap has taken on a greyer hue than the previous day. I spot Ahmed circling the field, taking pictures of the vets measuring the cows and of people choosing their cows, at times directing them

and telling them to hold the pose. The beneficiaries move slowly because of the intense heat and some just take the first cow they see. He comes to the checkout counter and says “nothing good” – I can see this because without any shade the sun is too harsh at mid-day, bleaching out colours. “We have another cow fair tomorrow if we get nothing here”. At this point a petite, dark woman with animated features with two small children enters the queue for the contract signing. She is oozing with joy, laughing out loud which shows her discoloured teeth. She tells her children to look into the camera and lifts the younger one on the cow. She has a charismatic feminine charm and I can tell Ahmed is curious. He asks her where she lives. She responds and adds we can come and visit later – Soniya nods from behind the desk that she will direct us.

“If we have time...” and he is off again.

Scene 2

After our beneficiaries from Gondamari go through the selection and contract signing process, we leave for the village together with Sumanya's family and the other villagers. The cows are led by their new owners, encouraged along with a swift whip of a branch when they slow or decide to stray off the path. One calf with protruding ribs is struggling, wobbling on its feet. I tell Ahmed I fear the cow will pass out – and its owner, a small sized man laughs uncomfortably as he tries to encourage it to stay on the elevated path. Ahmed says: everyone is dehydrated. That whole event was horrible. There was no shade and no water either for the cattle or the people.

I ask about Ahmed what he saw and he said, “the cattle dealer was a scam artist. He was trying to get rid of his sick cows and make the charity pay. The charity vets had to turn back about 20 of them. People know how to manipulate the system when charity and poor people are involved. They are an easy target”.

He continues “It's a well known fact and it is good that the veterinarians are there to provide some protection. I spoke with a second wife [a beneficiary from the neighbouring village] and she said that during Cyclone Sidr they could get free rice and that was nice, but not essential as they could have worked and found something without the handouts. But she felt the cow is an asset; which she can use to improve conditions for her family. In 4-5 years another 3 calves can bring in 10,000 Taka each and about 30,000 Taka in milk revenue”.

Ahmed thinks for a moment and says “‘A rich person buys five cows and other assets and after a while forgets about them, but for a poor person it is a lifetime to cherish – a dream come true’. Remind me to write it down later”. I say I will.

Scene 3

Back at the village of Gondamari there is an expectant feeling and once we arrive, people slip into activity: beneficiaries presenting their livestock and fetching water, men evaluating the new cows, children recounting the events, and other women going directly to work to prepare lunch. No one pays us any special attention and we join the gathering. A school boy of about 12 fetches his knife and begins carving a peg to secure his cow in the field to graze.(Photograph 54) He shows great knife skills and Ahmed praises him. The villagers follow on with Ahmed's comment and tell of his grandfather who is also skilled in carpentry. He sits next to his grandson and shows us his skills – looking over at his grandson with pride. Sumanya, the girl from the previous day, announces her arrival with a high pitched squeal as she jumps in the spotlight and gives a big hug to her new grey coloured cow. It is obvious Ahmed finds her amusing and is humoured by her tomboy-like qualities. He asks her questions and tells her she has chosen a really strong cow. She watches him with suspicion and smiles at him. He takes his camera and takes a few shots as she leans her cow looking straight into the camera. Even Ahmed smiles at this point and pats her on the back as he moves on to the next subject.(Photograph 55)



Photograph 54 – Boy carving a peg
©Author



Photograph 55 – Sumanya posing for the camera
©Author

The man in chains is on the river's edge about to be bathed by his wife, and Ahmed heads over and squats away from view and takes a few shots while chatting to the wife. Back in the yard women are preparing food and we return to write down the story details. I say to Ahmed – “I thought that people were more relaxed than yesterday”.

“They understand now I am not from the charity. Yesterday though, they tried to tell me of their poverty in hopes of getting something. It's a happy day, so happy pictures”. He is generally

pleased with the village shots and, as is generally the case, some people are better with the camera while some people remain stiff.

6.1.8 Day Four: Distribution of Charity Vouchers

For Day Four of the assignment we move to a new location and new field office. A young NGO staff member called Touhit is our guide and informant on the activities for the next few days. Our first meeting is with a beneficiary family with whom Touhit will present a voucher for the following day's cattle fair.

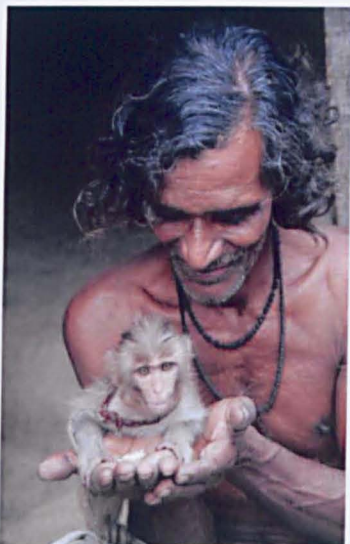
Scene 1

Ahmed, Touhit and I, enter the courtyard of a group of wooden houses. There is a chrysanthemum tree in bloom and upon Touhit's greeting there is a scurry of activity from under the veranda of one house. An older woman in a yellow tattered sari and bindi timidly peaks out, and starts clearing up the veranda. She has a round face and gentle movements – she appears apologetic and nervous. People come out from the back rooms and one of them is the woman's husband, Mr Prionats. He is wearing a white lungi with holy beads around his neck, has shoulder length wavy hair and is missing most of his teeth so his cheeks have sunk. The couple are the recipients of the livestock programme and Touhit presents them with the voucher. They do not show any overt signs of happiness but the woman puts the paper in a safe place. They speak but do not they make eye contact.

When Ahmed attempts to take a picture of Mr Prionats in a relaxed moment when he is not aware of the camera, Mrs Prionats alerts him and ruins the shot as he stiffens and faces the camera directly. Ahmed doesn't take the shot and the third time she interrupts Ahmed loses his temper and says "Stop moving around and go away!" His command frightens her and she throws her hands in the air and scurries inside the house, almost tripping on a stool on her way in. Ahmed's outburst surprises all of us and everyone turns self-conscious.

It is clear he is annoyed and he goes to sit on the edge of the house in the shade. He sits in silence, watching the family who are all on their veranda. More family members come out from the other house and all attention is indirectly on Ahmed with whispers of "What's going on? What is he doing?" Touhit also looks puzzled and unsure of what to do. After he collects himself, he says to me: "sometimes nothing happens and you just have to wait". The tension is still high so I wander to the back and find a reservoir where a neighbour is bathing his monkey. I take some pictures and motion him to come to the house where everyone is seated. The monkey provides an external focus point which releases the tension and the mood lightens. The monkey jumps on the chrysanthemum tree and people laugh, they tease it until it escapes to find refuge with Mr Prionats. (Photograph 56) Mrs Prionats has now returned to the group but doesn't say or do anything and just observes from the sidelines. Mr Prionats feeds the monkey and provides some nice portraits and he has a

very interesting look with his long hair and his gentle manner. We agree to meet them at the cattle fair the following day.



Photograph 56 – A portrait of Mr Prionats. ©Author



Photograph 57 – Activities at Mr Prionats' house as we wait. ©Author

As we leave, Ahmed has calmed down somewhat "I don't want just another face, I want a story".

"What is the story?" I ask.

He explains what I have missed. This would suit well: the story of a minority group man, in harsh conditions, during a lean period. Mr Prionats' family is Hindu and he makes a living by crab fishing. Crab does not sell well in a predominantly Muslim community because according to the principles of Islam crab is considered mushtabahat i.e. in a grey area existing between halal and haram – so there is confusion as to its cleanliness and Muslims generally avoid it. Also they have given permission for us to film the puja ceremony, the Hindu blessing ceremony to welcome the cow into the family.

Scene 2

We go for a walk with Touhit around the community where the charity's field office is located. Touhit explains how charities must register with the government office in order to be allocated a specific territory to carry out their work. This ensures other organisations do not duplicate or interfere with the programme plan. Ahmed asks if Touhit has met the management of the funding charity.

Touhit confirms he has, the Communication Director arrived for a day-visit in a chartered sea plane and caused a spectacle as it landed at the local river crossing. Ahmed heats up: "If I would have known that I would have asked for some more money. You can't have an important foreigner using bumpy roads". Touhit continues, the rental cost of the plane was 600,000 Taka for one day.

We continue walking in silence. We see plaques and billboards reading names of various international organisations such as Save the Children, Oxfam and European Commission sponsorship projects marking the entrance to the individual settlements off the main road.

The red and white Save the Children metal plaque looks new and shows no signs of rust in stark contrast with the others we have seen. A straw house marks the path leading down and I go first around the house. "You missed it! That would have been a great shot" I hear Ahmed from behind – he is speaking about a toddler playing with a blue plastic container, and the evening light made the colours stand out. As the toddler saw us he stopped and the spontaneity of the image was lost. I let Ahmed take the lead as we walk deeper in to the inner yard of the family houses. It is a spot overlooking the river from elevated ground, with direct view of the fishing boats. There is no reception from the community as we have arrived unannounced: a couple is building a roof to their house – they glance at us and return to work. Children are playing in the yard with the older ones carrying babies on their hips. Some come closer to see us and Ahmed walks around confidently taking pictures without asking permission. I take my camera out, some turn around quickly while others run away squealing, with only the braver ones staying. Touhit says he doesn't know these people and his charity has no links with them. I feel awkward and am happy to leave, but Ahmed is unaffected and stops to take a picture of an exotic bird high up in the tree with a longer lens.

6.1.9 Day Five: Documentation of the Cattle Fair

Scene 1

Mr and Mrs Prionats are in the first group to choose their cow. There are ten to choose from in the market square and they move with hesitation, walking around the herd without expression. Ahmed says to me with minor annoyance "they would be perfect but they just don't show any emotion" Their eyes are always downcast. (Photograph 58) He continues trying, coaxing them to get closer until a woman enters with her teenage son who is about 13. The son hesitates and stands back while she moves forward swiftly pushing through the cows. Ahmed and I stand in surprise for a moment and Ahmed moves closer. The woman is engrossed in choosing, she touches the cows, looks in their eyes, checks their udders, pets them – her movements are large and she holds in place – she speaks to her son on the sidelines. Ahmed and I are both circling her which she slowly becomes aware of but doesn't change her behaviour. There is something theatrical about her movements and her face is expressive. Both of our cameras shoot in quick succession, she is mesmerising and expresses the emotion which was lacking in previous photos and her manner contrasts with the stiffness of the Prionats'. For a moment I am lost in my lens because she is elegant and her movements are easy to anticipate. Her name is Monjurani. She lives in the neighbouring village and agrees to allow us to visit and watch the puja ceremony.

At the checkout queue some more pictures were taken of Mr and Mrs Prionats and they seem pleased. They have chosen a larger sized white cow which looks well fed. Ahmed tries to ask them questions and get some expression but they don't interact. There is gentleness in the way they

approach the animal as it rubs its nose against Mr. Prionats while he scratches its neck.(Photograph 59) Ahmed is not looking and I say “Watch, they do have expression and emotion but it is very subtle”. He retorts “I am sure but it’s not obvious”.



Photograph 58 – Mr and Mrs Prionats selecting a cow ©Author



Photograph 59 – At the checkout queue ©Author

Scene 2

Monjurani is delighted when we arrive and runs out to greet us. She says she has been preparing for the welcome puja once the cow arrives with her son from the market. She lives in a small straw house next to a wealthier Hindu family. They allow her family of four to stay there in exchange for undertaking some small chores. This is an arrangement of charity because Monjurani’s husband is deaf-mute and her elder child is hearing impaired. Ahmed and I look at each other upon realising this – and are provided with the answer as to why she has such accentuated movements and communicates in such a clear manner.

Scene 3

Incense is lit, grass is collected and a large bowl of water awaits the new member of the family. We stand as audience in front of their house and Monjurani directs her husband to stand in front of Ahmed, and the cow is directed between them. She bends down and washes each of the hooves while massaging the calf’s legs. She is chanting and points for her husband to feed the cow. She places some grass on the head of the cow and chants louder. As the cow chews the fresh grass, she bows placing her forehead on the ground and her husband follows suit. We take pictures and they bow a few more times. (Photograph 60) She then takes the cow to the pond and washes her.



Photograph 60 – The Puja ceremony
©Author



Photograph 61 – Monjurani washing her new cow. Similar shot used in a communications campaign October 2011 ©Author

After the Shoot

The final image count was 1000 images for the charity and a selection of captions for the images as well as longer scripts including direct quotes from the beneficiaries. The brief provided by Father James had been the only guidance for the assignment with no indication of where they would be used. Ahmed suspected they would most likely go for fundraising and upon submission he would also suggest that they be used for exhibitions or the people's stories could be followed up in the future as a longitudinal documentary.

He identified his main aim as showing perseverance and the strength of the population in their harsh surroundings. Therefore he aimed to capture as much of the background environment as possible and provide captions to explain their stories as they were reported to him. The caption attached to the image of Akimunesa (Photograph 38), the woman in the violet sari with her paralysed husband, read: *"I am an old woman and they never take an old woman to work. They [the work project] didn't make me carry anything, just pound the earth...poverty, this is as it has always been. I have two sons and they are day labourers in Dhaka and struggle to make ends meet. They send us new dresses for Eid and there is no one to take care of old people"*

6.2 Chapter Conclusion

In comparison to the case studies presented in Chapter 5 this lengthy documentary assignment offered the photographer opportunities to research the region and the lives of its people in a more in-depth way. The micro-ethical concerns that were discussed in Chapter 4 on NGO branding and photographic guidelines did not feature heavily in the assignment, but appeared in the form of continual ethical and aesthetic decision-making and assessments of the situations which arose on a minute by minute basis in the field. The case study revealed the occasional precariousness and vulnerability of the position of the photographer in having to deal with altercations and challenges arising from the community, which pose a challenge to the one-way flow of power in the interactions of image making.

The extended presence of the photographer allowed the opportunity for trust to develop with people. There was a need to build solidarity and trust within the communities, in part for one's own safety as well as to persuade people to participate and give access to their lives. Ahmed's underlying philosophy was that he had the responsibility to document the stories of individuals who are in dire circumstances and to uphold the silent contract that is implicitly made with the photographic subjects, in exchange for access. A more detailed examination of the tensions and how ethics were operationalised in the processes and practices, as exemplified in the case study Chapters 5 and 6, is the topic of Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

Operationalising Ethics: Preferences, Performances and Silent Guidelines

7.1 Introduction

Chapters 5 and 6 have presented ethnographic accounts of four photographic assignments describing the contexts within which photographers operate. Located in the development aid and image industries, the cases showed how the particular assignment demands, personal moral frameworks and ethical protocols influenced social interactions and determined decisions in the field. This chapter addresses themes exemplified in the case studies and presents photographers' perspectives on the issues and their individual approaches to assignment photography.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Firstly, the tensions specific to the Bangladeshi photographic industry are identified, which positions the analysis of the ethnographic recording of lived experience into the social context within which Bangladeshi photographers operate. Secondly themes and parallels are drawn between the observations and interview data with photographers describing the nature of photographic assignments and highlighting significant themes in interpreting guidelines, preferred subjects and power in the photographic interaction. The last section presents an investigation into how practice is negotiated and enacted at this level of production through the conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity.

7.2 Tensions in the Industry: From within and beyond

The two photographers observed in the case studies, Saikat and Ahmed, were Bangladeshi, full-time professionals for whom NGO assignments comprised the main bulk of their work. Both had positioned themselves as social documentarians and were sensitised to the criticism surrounding poverty imagery, which came not only from academic circles but was current in wider society. The

Bangladeshi photographers I observed and interviewed⁵⁵ had an understanding of photographic critique which was widely shared in addition to a keen awareness of the photographic histories of their country, the conventions employed to make these histories and the societal rebuke occasionally addressed at them, giving the Bangladeshi photographers I was in contact with a heightened self-consciousness to the visual languages they deployed.

The success of the new generation of Bangladeshi photographers in the international arena, among them Munem Wassif⁵⁶ and GMB Akash⁵⁷, has not rendered them immune from criticism. Their success has attracted questions about photography's ability to produce positive social changes and some have argued that the continued recycled representations of poverty and despair are evidence of how photographers from the global South have appropriated neo-Orientalist perspective under the label of indigenous photography. Zaman, writing about the photography scene in Bangladesh in a contemporary arts review magazine called *Depart*, comments on the images of Wasif:

'It is, perhaps, due to the subject matter he [Wasif] delves into that we are thrown back to the threshold of the issue of 'empathy image' time and again. Whether the empathy to which he responds to...has to do with the First World's demand for the Third World crisis image, or is a genuine investment in understanding human condition, we are left in a conflicting state of mind.' (Zaman 2010)

In a harsher tone Ebadur Rahman, a curator and commentator on Bangladeshi art, goes further and questions the 'poornography' produced by current photographers on Bangladeshi subject matter. In his response to the work of Akash he considers it to 'not so much expose exploitation and suffering as reproduce it, or, if you will, that his reproductions are not so much representational as material' (Rahman 2011, p.72). He criticises the photographers for 'blurring the difference between suffering and emotionalised or guilt-ridden consumption [which] is increasingly dispatched as a marketing strategy by Bangladeshi photographers' (ibid., 2011, p.72). Photographers thus become accused of

⁵⁵ In this chapter I quote from six other interviews with Bangladeshi photographers and three non-Bangladeshi humanitarian photographers, a Mexican, a Frenchman, and an American. It was this group of eleven photographers in this chapter who provided the most descriptive insights into practice and echo many of the other informal conversations I had with many other photographers in the context of workshops, photography festivals and personal contacts. Pseudonyms are used and the Bangladeshi photographers' names are Akil, Bitan, Chandran, Eknath, Faisal, Shehab in addition to the case study photographers Saikat and Ahmed. The other international photographers' names are Diego, Hugo and Greer.

⁵⁶ Munem Wasif's work has attracted national and international attention. In 2009, early in his career, he won the Prix Pictet and produced a series of photographs called *Salt Water Tears* which was launched as an exhibition in London and also displayed in Bangladesh during Chobi Mela 2011.

⁵⁷ GMB Akash has forged an international career and has won numerous photographic prizes such as the UNICEF Photo of the Year 2010. He has been acclaimed for his images in the social documentary genre with his subject matter mainly drawn from Bangladeshi society.

adopting identities as 'humanitarian photographers' as a way of attracting lucrative assignments and promoting careers which continue to reproduce charity stereotypes, rather than supporting the social mission purported to be the main purpose of the practice.

This attack on photographers for utilising the disadvantaged in society as a professional marketing strategy reflects, in part, the symbiosis which has developed between the development organisations and the photographic community in Bangladesh. The continued theme of Bangladeshi 'miserabilia' can be partially explained by the prominence of development organisations operating in the country and their newly defined role as the major funders of social documentary projects. Many of the elite photographic awards in social documentary are in part sponsored by development organisations⁵⁸.

In the time I spent in Bangladesh there were numerous ongoing, or recently ended, photography projects between photographers and the NGOs. UNICEF was partnering with Pathshala and the European Union and had just launched an exhibition and book called *Do you see my world?, Rural Life of Bangladesh through adolescents' eyes* (2010), a participatory photography project with rural youth documenting their daily lives having been guided by professional photographers. UNDP had partnered with Drik and the Danish government and had published a photography book in conjunction with an exhibition on the effects of corruption called *Fighting Corruption: A Collective Responsibility* (2008) for which professional photographers were commissioned. The charity CONCERN financed the publication of a book of Shehab Uddin's personal photography project entitled *Amrao Manush: The Pavement Dwellers* (2008), a documentation of the lives of street dwellers in the streets of Dhaka⁵⁹.

In addition, in 2010, the World Food Programme launched its annual photography competition with the theme of food insecurity. The objective of the award was to raise national awareness and understanding of the impact of food insecurity on the most vulnerable sectors of society, especially

⁵⁸ See for example the prestigious *UNICEF Photo of the Year Award* held annually by UNICEF Germany and GEO magazine since the year 2000. See also *Click about it Photography Competition* in cooperation with European Journalism Centre (EJC), Oxfam International and the European Commission which, in 2011, encouraged images on the theme of 'Aid' and in 2012 on 'Crises and Disasters'.

⁵⁹ In my interview about his book Shehab Uddin admitted that publication would have been unlikely without the charity's support, but he also viewed the subject matter as worthwhile because it raised awareness and funds to support the charity's work. This body of work was also exhibited in the Asian Art Biennial at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in 2009-2010.

poor women and children (WFP Bangladesh, 2010). The Director for the competition described its purpose as two-fold: *"it will create an understanding among photographers of the need for these types of images, and second, we will get a large number of photos we can use in the future"*. (Head of External Relations, WFP)

The strategy of organisations to promote cultural production, such as photographic competitions and exhibitions, promotes and prioritises the type of photography that the organisation needs, and in doing so in the form of a competition, allows for the sourcing of free content from photographers aspiring to gain recognition for their work. The growing role of NGOs in funding cultural industries has led to an expansion of the avenues for distribution and an increase in the use of artists and well-known photographers commissioned to image campaign messages⁶⁰. By promoting NGO projects through photography and art exhibitions with cooperation with cultural institutions, expanded presence in the media is made possible, by achieving coverage in the culture pages as well as the more traditional placements in international development sections or disaster reporting (Nissinen, 2008). The merging of NGO and cultural industries supports the logic of maximising visibility and was acknowledged by Ahmed as affecting his professional considerations and playing a vital role in securing assignments.

"Without the development money you cannot do it [work as a photographer] and the present-day development money is the money the state used to provide in the past. Now development organisations fund artists and writers." (Ahmed)

The merging of NGOs and cultural industries raise questions of editorial independence in those projects which claim a reporting function. The pressures to produce the type of imagery suitable for NGO needs, limits subject matter and the perspectives taken on the issues. The resulting biases and lack of independence that this situation provokes is tenuously accepted yet discontent with how to position one's work and maintain a reputation within the limitations offered by the NGO positive/negative divide remains a challenge as expressed by Bitan.

"This is the NGO sector showing happy faces to say that we have achieved development. We [photographers] have the power to portray that but that is the

⁶⁰ One example of this in the UK context was documented in my Master's thesis titled *Visual Rhetoric in Advocacy*. Save the Children UK commissioning award-winning photographers for the 2012 campaign to combat UK child poverty. Christian Aid in partnership with Wolverhampton Art Gallery showcased other renowned contemporary artists on the 2008 campaign topic of Children in Conflict (Nissinen, 2008).

Bangladesh that I don't want forced on my pictures. Then on the other side, you have many photographers, showing black and white images of poverty and saying that this is indigenous photography – this to me is not right and this is a dangerous line we walk.” (Bitan)

The double-bind of working for an international agency and accepting commissioner directives may at times be in opposition to personal preferences and understandings of the situation. This tension was apparent with most photographers I spoke to who wished to portray negative situations in dignified, positive ways, as a matter of professional and personal duty but understood the limitations of choice in doing so.

“Being a photographer of a Western agency, they have invisible criteria that are not only for me. Every agency needs to serve their purpose and their audiences, so where the photography is going to be published, who is going to see your photo and what makes sense in that context need to be considered. Most of the time photographers who take pictures of disasters tend to victimise the victims and not to show them in a dignified way...They are already the victims, so now the important part is to show the struggle, their hopes, and their dreams.” (Akil)

Others questioned the moral boundaries of photographic practice:

“I have been to the Sidr area after the cyclone and I couldn't take photos because people were holding my arms and crying because they had lost their children. In one village everyone had lost their children – how can I take a picture of these people in this state? Am I a vulture? But photographers are vultures, trying to get that image in order to get the award and money.” (Bitan)

However, for others, the negotiation between the demands of the client and their own personal aspirations of what and how they wish to photograph required limited consideration:

“It depends on the assignment you send me to. If I work for the donor agency then I want to portray poverty to make the donor happy. Immediately my vision will be theirs. Honestly speaking, we are all human, so if I am paid by the donor agency, I want to give them what they want.” (Chandran)

Among the photographers I worked with there was a common feeling that some assignments and photo opportunities compromised personal values and it was only the more senior photographers who were able to be selective about their assignments and negotiate their terms. In addition to their sense of personal responsibility to subjects and their own practice, interviewees often referred to a

collective responsibility to provide alternatives to the conventional representations of their country promoted by media and development organisations. Akil laments that this style has yet to be found.

"It has always been a challenge for us to tell the story differently because we have been copying or biased by Western photographers. We don't have our own kind of style so when we talk about photography we immediately bring an example from Western photographic history. We can't seem to overcome this challenge." (Akil)

Differentiating themselves from foreign photographers on the basis of their understanding of the cultural context was cited as a major strength and competitive advantage in the industry, and potentially a way to address the Western-biased style of photography. It suggested a belief in the possibility of presenting more in-depth and potentially more accurate narratives of the people portrayed than foreign photographers who lacked knowledge of the cultural context were capable of capturing.

"I think there are two issues, familiarity and levels of comfort. When you are doing a story you have to know as much as possible, otherwise it just captures the surface of the story. The process is more than just taking photographs and that is the difference I find between the Western photographers and the local ones. In terms of doing in-depth documentary, you must invest time and research, otherwise as a good photographer you produce graphically strong photographs, but as a strong photographer you are able to produce emotionally strong photographs." (Akil)

A pride in the level of professionalism, as well as a confidence in the ability to compete in the international image economy, was apparent according to Ahmed.

"They [foreign photographers] are flown in so you can't expect anything more than that, can you? They will be taken to a location and shoot – and maybe you don't give them enough time to connect with the local community and there is also the language barrier. Possibly that is the reason outsiders are not having success in Bangladesh. They just can't compete with us now... in quality, or in context." (Ahmed)

Whether this is a strategy to differentiate themselves from competitors in the industry or not, these positions were based on the understanding that local photographers are in a position to reveal 'other' narratives not accessible to outside photographers. This division between local and outside photographers was introduced and enforced by messages of the Drik photo agency as part of its

marketing strategy⁶¹, and has been adopted in various forms. However the increased influence of international NGOs in defining subject matter complicates the mission and draws attention to the problems of revealing 'an indigenous photography' which is seen to be judged by western imposed standards.

"The technical ability can be achieved after one or two years. But it has always been a challenge for us to tell the story differently, because we have been copying Western photographers. We don't have our own kind of style. When we talk about photography we immediately bring an example from Western photography. We have not been able to overcome this challenge." (Akil)

There is a desire to develop a unique style of photography and imagery of the country by Drik's members as a way of challenging imposed conventions. Defining talent by the photographer's country of origin may be limiting in light of the international nature of the image industry and the high mobility of photographers. The 'indigenous' photographer label may be interpreted by some as a description indicating a lack of skill.

"Who is deciding that I am a photographer from the majority world and you are from minority world? That to me is also an illusion and a loophole. I am a photographer and I tell my individual story." (Bitan)

The label of 'majority world photographer' stands as an influential marketing strategy⁶², and for an industry which has been driven to a homogenised and standardised environment, offers the possibility for new and unseen narratives. Simultaneously however, the attachment of such labels incurs the danger of reducing the work of talented photographers to identity politics and cementing the differences between the West and global South, which are the very ones they aim to challenge.

⁶¹ 'We specialise in high quality imagery that provides unique insights into local cultures, development issues, environments and contemporary lifestyles in these diverse continents. We also work with client organisations to commission assignments with our experienced photographers who understand the language, the culture, and the locality because it is their own.' (Majority World, 2012)

⁶² An exhibition initiated by Majority World called *Insider Outsider? - Photography that challenges perceptions of the developing world* was held in July 2012 at the Guardian Gallery, London as a showcase of work from photographers from South Asia, Latin America and Africa, and provided a case for local narratives. Shahidul Alam, the founder of Drik discussed this strategy. *"I use a phrase I have heard in Africa that goes something like, until the lions find their storytellers, the stories of hunting will always glorify the hunter. And for me, that is quite pertinent, I think we are trying to create a platform whereby local practitioners will tell their stories."* (Alam in Tran, 2012)

7.3 Assignment Photography: Considerations and evaluations

The case studies in Chapter 5 exemplified the processes involved in the short structured assignments and Chapter 6 offered an account of the more expanded considerations and negotiations that confront the photographer on in-depth assignments. The possibility to explore creative expression and time to conduct independent inquiry introduced extended ethical considerations in decision-making. The majority of NGO assignments were typically not concerned with primarily aesthetics but stood as evidence-oriented documentary with content and composition largely determined before entering the field. The NGO commissioner was able to dictate the terms and the frames required. The format focus was either an individual beneficiary or a particular activity carried out:

"Every frame is written out...either I need an image of a woman, with a child, in that hut, at that time because of the sun [light]. We want to tell this story. She [the woman] has been briefed and we follow her around. Or then there is a distribution on a particular day – and these are the five shots: a shot of the bag, with logo, opening the bag, distribution of rice, and the people at distribution will do [the scene]ten times in front of you so you get that shot." (Regional Information Officer, ECHO)

Each of these demanded images were highly structured and photographers were allowed limited freedom to express creativity, or to seek in-depth reports of the situation. Photographers generally understood their responsibility to operate within these restricted parameters and capture the narrative with the understanding of their client needs although they were also aware of the limitations.

"The job of communications teams is to sell projects by presenting proof that past ones worked; they[communications messages]need to have a human touch to them, they [communications staff] also need to keep it fresh by finding new problems and new solutions. Communications people are there to sell ideas and they usually choose second rate images I wouldn't use. (Ahmed)

The increased influence of development organisations on representational practices and the promotion of their own ethical guidelines need not necessarily contradict photographers' desires to represent subjects with dignity. However there are subtle and silent restraints, which are implicitly understood by the photographers, and prove more difficult to negotiate in practice.

7.3.1 Professional gain versus potential impact on assignment selection

As well as providing a living, the desired outcome for the work of a photojournalist is the wide circulation of his/her images and the public recognition of their role as a catalyst for influencing public opinion and resulting in social change. In the interviews the choice of accepting assignments generally revolved around these two criteria.

"How can I help the situation [Sichuan Earthquake 2008] with my work and make a difference? If I think it's worth it, I'll take the chance to go there, but if the consideration is to just have it in my portfolio or have photos to get into photo contests, then no. As much as I wanted to go, it contradicted my ethical reasoning. So it's not the measure of crisis but of impact. However this is not something I can always do, but that's how I try to move and make my decisions." (Diego)

The satisfaction of completing assignments which are assessed to have influenced social change reinforces the sense of social mission and responsibility of the profession as expressed by Akil.

"In 2007 when Sidr struck I was travelling in the South. I got a call from UNICEF asking for images of children, particularly children and women suffering, who were affected by the cyclone. They used one of my photographs to appeal for help...I was very satisfied. It is not what I am able to do for that particular child in the photograph, but with that particular photograph, millions of dollars have been collected. That photograph created the situation for the Western population." (Akil)

This satisfaction with the outcome of the assignment however did not accord with other desires to counteract stereotypes and present more positive images of Bangladesh. In this situation the need to document human suffering conflicted with the aims of representational reform, and the decision to work on this project is based on the rationale that the direct impact of this image for the communities affected outweighed the wider representational and political demands. This position, and its dilemmas, is reminiscent of those that beset many forms of NGO communications.

"As a communicator you are always trying to use the story of That Child in order to tell a wider story about children in those circumstances and the best interests of children in general." (Regional Communications Director, World Vision)

The rationale behind this ethical justification is that the misery of and potential harm to one child can justify the potential and actual future benefit for many. The photographer's claim to bear witness in this situation absolves them of accusations of opportunism. A similar justification is

used at the NGO level and the use of this type of image is justified as dissolving the elements of voyeurism which can be directed at them.

7.3.2 How to interpret the positive?

The demand for a positive portrayal of beneficiaries is central to the branding policies of organisations as discussed in Chapter 4 and a cemented practice in the development communications industry. One part of this strategy is to emphasise positivity focusing on the activity and resilience of the photographic subjects, despite the negative and vulnerable circumstances they live. This not only makes for more interesting images and ones to which multiple narratives can be attached, but it also suggests the positive, human rights based work of the organisations is empowering their beneficiaries. Photographers also supported this strategy and attempted to avoid re-victimising their subjects in a position which was consistent with that taken by the development organisations (see Chapter 4). Akil interpreted positivity at the level of practice was depicting activity, *"Positive means activity - not only sitting, hopeless and helpless"* (Akil).

Unless otherwise requested, it was widely understood as a default that most NGO assignments were *"advertising the story of hope, the story of struggle, the story of resistance and resilience is common"* (Greer). This echoed many photographers' personal preferences:

"...whether you show people as victims, as fighters or as heroes is important to me. I don't mind showing people as heroes and then people feeling proud about that – it is showing them being a part of the change." (Bitan)

An example of the choices available in the field was exemplified by a senior photographer during the floods in the north of Bangladesh in 2004. He expressed how he was able to satisfy the demands of the commissioners, align them with his personal ethics and show the resiliency to the subjects.

"I found refugees and saw a family who came with their house. Their roof was in a boat along with their essentials, and believe me, within two hours they had rebuilt their house. I was amazed how the family of five or six members, without any knowledge of engineering, built a house. So that is a positive story instead of people dying of diarrhoea or no food for several days. There is always the potential for stories which show power and struggle such as this family building the house. The

focus of the pictures was on the muscles to communicate how powerful they are.”
(Akil)

Akil, like others, was proud of his ability to represent people in vulnerable circumstances and those undergoing trauma in a positive way, by showing or hinting at the support they receive or their resilience under the harsh conditions. Photographers are generally aware of the ethical balance which must be found between their personal intention to show dignity and the demands of commissioners to showcase the success of their projects. Awareness that the insertion of captioning is able to expand and attach new narratives to images makes it possible to suggest positivity in an otherwise negative situation.

“At this time [an assignment on AIDS patients] everyone is saying, I want to say something positive and it is possible to represent a negative situation positively. For example if I am holding a hand, and the caption says, this is not a hand of a normal person, it is the hand of an HIV patient. This connotes the help and support they are receiving” (Chandran)

Captioning remains a tool for photographers to narrate their images but it is not one they can always retain control of. Even if the subject is depicted in a dignified way in the image, once text is attached – often by NGO communications teams - the meaning can be significantly altered. Unless separately stipulated in contract, the photographer is left without control over the captioning attached to the photographs, which can dangerously usurp the intended messages.

Technical considerations are also able to transform and communicate desired messages. Images intended to present disaster and dire need often conform to ‘the wide angle black and white, grainy, high contrast images which characterise the typical third world helpless victim’ (Alam, 1994). The use of black and white creates a mute surface, and is generally used in communications which want a stark, simple message. In contrast, for human interest stories, and ones intended to communicate optimism and hope, colour photographs are standard. The use of natural lighting offers a more authentic and less set-up feel to the image and is preferred on development projects. Warm tones are preferred to connote resilience and liveliness, as Bitan explains.

“I want to show people’s faces where you have the skin tone that is alive rather than pale - I want interesting light, colourful scenes and I love warm tones in my images – yellow light creates atmosphere that shows positivity, hope and optimism.” (Bitan)

The choice of equipment is also a factor in styles of work and the lens in particular is both a technical and an emotional device for a photographer which affects practice as it assists in finding the right distance between the person and the environment. The type of equipment choice is stipulated in some guidelines, as in the USAid guidelines on developing human interest stories. It advises its photographers: 'the 50mm lens corresponds to human eyesight, and therefore does not stray from reality. A longer lens flattens the picture. A 135mm lens is the maximum for realistic portrayal of human features' (De Ruiter et al., 2008).

7.3.3 Preferred Subjects: Women and children

The interviews and case studies show that photography is more suited to depict certain types of injustices and certain types of victims. Issues such as war, famine and natural disasters are visually engaging while other more complex issues such as institutional violence and structural inequalities are more complex to visualise. Within the limitations of the medium, and the preferences for simple narratives of humanitarian images, photographers look for a symbol to represent the collective. This is most often not recognised as a conscious strategy, but their selection of a subject for the camera is one who must be personal enough, but equally impersonal, so not to disrupt the collective of 'victims'. With this metonymic approach however, there is always the danger of depersonalising and dramatising an individual in order to tell a more persuasive story.

The preference for women and children, as the face of the ideal victim to represent the collective of 'unfortunates', was described in Chapter 2 and this preference was also stated explicitly in the branding strategies of organisations, although some, such as Action Aid, wanted to challenge directly the stereotypes of women (See Chapter 4). Images of women and children were also preferred by the photographers, for both practical and symbolic reasons. Uddin explained on preference for images of women in his book *Amrao Manush: Pavement Dwellers*.

"I don't think this [preference for women and children] only applies to NGOs. If you look through the whole history of the image world I would presume it is more than fifty per cent of women. The disadvantaged history is easier to record and also in an industry that is male dominated, I can say women are the general target of fascination." (Uddin)

Women were seen to symbolise the main pillars of Bangladeshi society and represented a form of resilience that suited the somewhat conservative narratives of the male photographers I interviewed.

"In Bangladesh women play a central role in family building, caretaking, family maintenance. Women are the main characters and so it only makes sense I use them to represent our society which is family-focussed." (Akil)

With many of the assignments requesting images of children, the setting is located in the familial context, one in which women are generally managing. In the case studies, shooting took place in rural locations and the demographics of the people present determined the subjects to a large extent. During the ideal filming times, adult males were often working as wage labourers in the cities or away from the homestead, leaving the women to manage children and the elderly. For practical reasons, as much as any other, women are often over-represented in humanitarian images.

Another reason for this preference is the issue of access, with women and children being more willing to participate and their emotional repertoires were also seen to be more expressive.

"We look for the women and children because visually, men are not emotional. In the village areas men tend to be rude and uncooperative because their job is very demanding. Visually women are more vibrant, most women wear saris and the children go to school, and the relations between them are warm. However, having said that, I do occasionally find men with their son or daughter, which can be touching. (Eknath)

In the research case studies women were the ones who welcomed us first. In Case Study Four, the filming generally took place in the home and around the homestead and therefore it was the women who took the lead in inviting us into their homes and explaining the family circumstances. As caretakers of the family they were typically found going to work within and near the home. In addition, many of the women were the target group identified as needing charity support because they were sole caretakers, widowed or elderly.

Working with children, from the photographer's view, was less complex in terms of access than adults. Children became the initial contact into the community and a non-threatening way to start conversations with the adults (see Cassell, 1987). Adults were generally more self-conscious, and when the photographers' attention was diverted to children, they did not object, and usually gladly

agreed, that their children could be filmed, relieved to not part-take in filming (also see Peterson, 2003). The attention on children was approved of by the adults of the community who were mostly entertained by it.

Children were willing collaborators with fewer restrictions on their time and were generally able to show a wider scale of activity, and less self-conscious about being filmed.

“Photographing children is easier although it takes a lot of time for them to forget about the camera. So the first day they just keep on smiling and jumping in front of the camera and then after that they forget about it. Children are more photogenic, and when they really forget about you, is when you can capture their nature while achieving this with adults is more difficult. We always wear masks, but with children it is always more honest.” (Diego)

This was exemplified in the case studies where children were the ones who approached first, whether it was to investigate the new visitors on location or marvel at camera equipment. They became part of the landscape, by always being there, either grinning widely into the lens when least expected or vying for attention by performing various perilous looking stunts. There was always a willingness to participate, and they encouraged each other to do so. This enthusiasm in part reflects the overwhelming positivity to the camera that exists in Bangladesh, which on occasions resulted in discontent where the decision not to photograph certain children was made, and futile explanations of low battery power did little to ease their disappointment.

7.3.4 Community cooperation and political awareness

In the four case studies presented in this thesis all the beneficiaries were willing to cooperate and provided the necessary access and information. Objections and complications were generally raised by people who were not receiving assistance from the charities and these were expressed in the form of critical comments and challenges to the photographer.

On the first day of Case Study Four, I initially had concerns about how easy it would be to negotiate access to the communities and families. The photographer’s answer to my concerns was telling: *“Of course they’ll be happy, they are getting a cow”* (Ahmed, see Case Study Four). The people and communities were cooperating and making time for us because they saw benefits in

participating, and either considered it an exchange for the programmes we documented, or cooperated in the hope of the programmes continuing in the future.

The assumed power of the photographer to influence the continuation of the programmes affected the levels of participation and personal stories of hardship were often recounted to the photographer. It was evident that the workers were keenly aware of our presence and some performed on our account by working harder, consenting to pictures more freely and speaking about how they enjoyed the project. It was this assumed power over the projects that assisted in gaining access to their lives and building their trust, although photographers had no power to change the terms of the projects.

In Case Study Four, when there were questions over the purposes of filming, the photographer clarified his role and stated explicitly that he was not personally involved with the management of charity programmes. Although Ahmed spoke with authority and was treated reverentially by the local NGO staff, it is unlikely that he was fully believed. Many photographers were aware that the hopes of the subjects can be manipulated or misunderstandings can be promoted, to encourage participation and access.

"Typically the annual reports for NGOs are made after the project has been completed and in the field no one will help you, because there is no money. The photographer has no control. As an example from my assignment for an NGO after a five-year project had finished, the community was not motivated to participate because the project had ended. In this situation you have to make good relations with the people and give them hope like, 'I am doing this documentation because the next project is coming', even though you don't know this. They are daily labourers, so if they gave you their time, one day would mean 200 Taka. During the project it is easy because they are getting paid when they think you are the evaluator and you have the power to make the project continue." (Faisal)

This assumed importance of the photographer, and the power differentials between the photographer and subject, and create a situation with the potential for tension. My experiences as a photographer confirm these feelings of insecurity and ambiguity, whereby great hopes are invested in you by the subjects but it is impossible to meet these expectations. It created a dynamic in which I was aware of the power I had and the ways in which I might manipulate it. However, it was not absolute and unidirectional and in some cases, it was reversed. One of the aspects overlooked is

how the photographer often needs the community to deliver their assignments, much more than the community needs them, and this remains a delicate balance. This point was emphasised to me by Ahmed on the first day of filming for Case Study Four when shooting in a busy river crossing. He warned: *"The camera gives you power, but the crowds are even more powerful"* (Ahmed). This was witnessed later in the assignment during which the altercation in the market place took place which could have escalated into a more hostile situation. This revealed the sensitive and powerless position the photographer can be placed in and the power the community has if they feel threatened or exploited. Approaching situations and people with respect becomes not only an ethical and regulatory imperative, but also a practical one for ensuring safety and access.

In my research the photographic subjects were highly aware of the potential power of images. Their evaluations about whether to participate – a process which occasionally involved changing their minds, was a process of interpreting the potential benefits and potential harm or inconvenience that could ensue. Their willingness to participate seemed a considered strategic decision, the best choice among a limited selection of choices, and a way of maximising the potential for more programmes to be implemented without too great a distraction to their daily schedules. They were also aware of the potential harm of the image. This was exemplified during an interaction with fishermen while collecting fringe shots for Case Study Four. A man's initial willingness to participate was interrupted by the elder's interjection and question addressed to me: *"where are the pictures going? I don't want to get caught by the police for using these illegal nets"*.

The accusations directed at the photographer and I in the market place in Case Study Four also suggest that there was awareness of how the community was being represented, and the commercial value and demand for images of poverty in the global image market. Our actions were perceived as *"selling our poverty again"* and stood as a valid point of contention and one which neither I nor the photographer could counteract. It is possible that in some communities people were unaware of the power of the camera but in the case of my research locations, this typically was not so. Mobile phones with camera technology and satellite dishes were a common sight even in the most remote communities. These observations contradict the underlying assumptions of power differentials in photography which implicitly assume the disadvantaged subjects lack an understanding of photographic practice and have limited capacity in comprehending the visual

sphere of communication because they are poor, agrarian and from the global South. This was not the case in this research and the implication of Bangladeshi photographic subjects as being in need of protection because they lack of awareness of the power dynamics intrinsic to representation has important implications on the development of ethical guidelines and is discussed in Chapter 8.

7.4 Operationalising Concepts on Assignment

This section returns to the framing concepts of solidarity, authenticity and dignity and how they are translated into practice. Although photographers did not use these exact terms to explain how they operated in the field, the concerns and ethical considerations were incorporated and well expressed in these three concepts. The section uncovers how they guide performances and are negotiated in practice.

7.4.1 Performing Authenticity: “Staged but not staged”

The most obvious conflicts arise when demands are placed on photographers to capture conditions and situations which do not exist, leading to pressures to stage and reconstruct events in order to meet the demands of the assignment. This sort of action casts in question the core concept of authenticity and the journalistic principles of accuracy in reporting.

The conflict between commissioners’ demands and the situation on the ground was usually revealed upon arriving at the filming location. The tension of negotiating between the methods to ensure assignment completion while not infringing personal standards was the most commonly cited issue faced. A reoccurring dilemma was the creative tensions to overcome the logistical and timing problems, as exemplified on an assignment to capture the lives of a rural community during the rainy season and of children playing in water by Eknath.

“This is not real. What I mean is that this pond is not for swimming – it is for fish cultivation. I was commissioned in the winter season and this was the only body of water I could find. Normally during the rainy season children are playing in water, but never in the fish pond. Although this is not the real situation but it is also not entirely inaccurate. It’s just because I came in the wrong season.” (Eknath)

In other situations also, this poses an ethical dilemma:

“The main objective was to take footage and make it emotional. They [NGOs] need to collect money abroad and what they wanted to show was what was happening with the

money. That was the objective for this assignment and I find the same objectives every time... to make the images emotional even if it is not real. The actual situation is often different from the official situation.” (Faisal)

He continues to explain how he made his decision in these situations and argues that staging is sometimes necessary to satisfy the client’s demands.

“Sometimes I find it very complicated to make photographs, when what they want is not there. In one case they did not even start the project but they wanted the photographs. They got the funds a week previously but immediately had to show the project had started, so we had to construct the scene. In situations such as this I am confused...but if I am told it will be happening say, in one month, then I can accept the project request.” (Faisal)

Ahmed, the photographer in Case Studies Two and Four, explains how compromise is reached between the contradicting demands of staging a picture to satisfy the client while still upholding the professional duty for reporting.

“So I always ask them [commissioners] how much success they want and how much failure are they willing to accept. They usually answer, not failure because we are trying to keep the programme running. They cannot show the project failures and to be honest, I don’t even know what would be considered the parameter of failure and success in a country like Bangladesh. If you expect a two million pound development project to be an overnight success, you are dreaming. So someone will question you [the photographer], why are portraying the situation in such a positive way? However, I am a contractor, so I am benefiting through the project and getting paid well, but how do I justify that? In that situation I go back to the committee and report on the failures not documented in the photos.” (Ahmed)

The notion of staging runs contrary to the ethos of social documentary and the journalistic professional code but despite admitting to recreating events for an assignment, the term staging, and suggestions of inauthenticity were quickly dismissed by interviewees and substituted with the alternative terms of ‘leading’ or ‘guiding’.

In an interview with Bitan I ask: “How then, do you show a person not as a victim?”

“For instance I did a twelve-image story on a girl who was born with paralysed arms, so she does everything with her feet. She writes, she paints and does everything with her feet. I shot in colour when she was wearing her best dress, not when her dress was torn. This I had to wait for, but many photographers would intentionally want to show

the torn dress. I wanted to avoid that and when I saw the dress, I waited. I wanted to show her beautiful."

"You asked her, or waited?"

"Waited. I also asked her to do certain things. I had developed this image of her running against the wind with a paddy field behind her. That was the emotion I wanted to capture and I wanted her to perform it as well."

"So you had the image in your mind before?"

"Yes, that is the way I work these days – I think of the image first."

"If you lead the person into that situation, are you not staging it?"

"No, no, not staging. We were there and this was an interesting idea of someone running against the wind."

Foreseeing and waiting for situations to happen is a strategy which does not lead to accusations of staging. This technique was described in Case Study Four by Ahmed, as 'the waiting game', during the case of the man with the lungi and this exemplified one strategy to avoid accusations of manipulation of the scene (see Case Study Four). Another photographer succinctly expressed the notion of waiting as a core strategy of practice: *"Because we cannot make them into actors we have to wait for reality to occur"* (Faisal).

7.4.2 Solidarity in Practice: Closing the Distance

Operationalising the concept of solidarity involves mediating the relationship between the viewing audiences and the beneficiaries in the images and closing the distance between the suffering Other and the fortunate viewer. Facilitating the connection can be achieved by image content and by the selection of motifs and activities which the audience can relate to. There are two stages in the production process where the notions of solidarity were identified. From the organisational perspective it is how the narrative is tailored – through mission statements and campaign slogans. The second way of expressing and performing solidarity is in the practices of filming and how access is negotiated into the lives of beneficiaries.

One way of closing the gap between audience and beneficiaries is to emphasise the similarities between the two. This strategy was set out in a confidential brief from a British charity. In this example shared notions of home, notions of family and popular culture were aimed at uniting the two groups.

“If you get a chance try to draw out the detail of the similarities in people’s lives – the shopping experiences, recipes, family meal times, music, hair styles, fashion – getting dolled up, the worrying about the kids, about money, jokes, mucking about, etc. Interpret [the campaign slogan] in your own way and try to capture its provocative optimism where appropriate.” (Oxfam, confidential document to photographer)

Solidarity during filming involves negotiating access into the lives of people and participating in their activities. Presenting oneself as non-threatening is an important element of this and connecting with their emotions is an essential skill in building solidarity and making certain images more suitable to the aims of humanitarian campaigns. As one photographer argued: *“Emotion and information are connected somehow” (Akil).*

The term in photographic training that is closely related to the idea of solidarity is that of ‘proximity’. This concept is a fluid one but generally refers to the ability of the viewer of the image to relate to the person in the picture and implies an emotional connection between the photographer and the person in front of the lens, which in turn is translated into the image and its viewers. In the photography training workshops I attended during the course of the research, evaluations of student projects typically included a discussion of ‘connection’ and ‘distance’ as evaluation criteria. Feedback sessions would include comments such as:

“It is clear they are looking at you because you have a camera not because you have an interesting relationship”; “It is about trying to find the right distance of the person and the environment”; “You aren’t emotionally involved with the people, they are too far removed.” (Greer)

The instructions from another teacher of photography indicate the importance of emotional experience to guide and achieve desired proximity.

“There are two things I teach my students: one is psychological distance and the other is physical distance of photographs, and how to play with these two to get different meanings. Your focus should be, how do you feel? For example, if you are taking a picture of a homeless person, how do you know what a homeless person feels like? You don’t, so go closer to achieve physical distance to compensate. It has to come from the heart and you have to feel it – go for features and emotions.” (Akil)

The need to achieve proximity and build an emotional connection provokes another tension, which as most assignment photography commissions in the case studies showed, concerns the time pressures which necessitate the fast building of often superficial yet meaningful relationships.

"If your purpose is to achieve your end regardless of means, then get the person to believe you have good intentions when you don't (or maybe you do). For me getting to know a person takes time and you just cannot go and forcibly make a connection."
(Bitan)

The Norwegian photographer and lecturer on photography Morten Krogvold⁶³ taught his students to achieve connection and therefore more emotional images by recommending that they distanced themselves slightly from the subject in order not to implicate themselves in greater deception or responsibility, guided by the advice: *"Become their friend, but not their best friend."* (Krogvold, pers. Comms 17 January 2011).

Many photographers argue that this connection or disconnection is transferred to the images, and if the skills to connect are lacking or if a forcible connection is made, its effects are thought to be visible in the final images.

"I saw how restless he [the foreign photographer] was when on a project for a magazine, and that restlessness resonated in me. He conveyed that, and the subject also became very uncomfortable. This obviously showed in the images. He brought with him an idea of a story and wasn't open to making the connection with the person (or the story) in front of him."

So, the final images were restless – and that is what we see. We assume this person [the subject] is uncomfortable and restless, however this is a reflection of his own restlessness and unhappiness – see how deceptive images can be". (Bitan)

The aim of closing the distance, whether or not it is truly achievable, raises further questions about the disclosure of purpose and subject agency. As with any human interaction there is always the potential to mislead subjects and conceal information. This interferes with informed consent and the building of solidarity between audience, photographer and subject. Deception is an important concern which is heightened when there is pressure to get photographs which 'go close' and which necessitate entering the private moments of subjects to capture emotion and activity. The decision facing the photographer is whether to pursue a method which allows for full collaboration or only selective disclosure.

⁶³ Morten Krogvold has cooperated with Pathshala for numerous years and encouraged photography student exchanges. He is a regular tutor at Chobi Mela photography festivals.

"I never tell them where the images will go. If I reveal that the commissioner is the National Geographic, it's only natural they will immediately change their clothes and the ways they cooperate. I rarely reveal where the images are going." (Greer)

By revealing the assignment specifics the subjects often alter their appearance and behaviour, either to provide the photographer the types of images they think are needed, or pose in the ways which are considered polite and obliging (see Case Study Four). However, the argument for the infringement of subject rights can be made if where and how the images will be used are deliberately concealed.

7.4.3 Dignity and Performance: Protecting and Respecting

In response to the interview themes of ethical and unethical photographic practices, I was frequently presented with actual occurrences from the industry which exemplified abuse and unethical behaviour on the part of other photographers. These examples worked as reference points which indicated the boundaries and divisions that exist, albeit tenuously, between ethical and non-ethical photography.

"A few years ago there was a photograph of a girl looking for food in a dustbin and he [the photographer] won many prizes for this photograph. I knew for a fact this girl was mentally challenged and so did the photographer. She didn't understand what was happening so my question is how can you contextualise this reality?" (Hugo)

Portraying dignity in photographic practice and performance should be an important and guiding ethical consideration and the above anecdote suggests that this was violated because issues of permission, the protection of identity and respect for subjects in their private moments were not taken into account. It may be less complicated to access what constitutes acceptable conduct when discussing other people's photographs but in the often unpredictable social environments where filming actually occurs, the evaluations often become obscure.

The ways in which permission is negotiated in practice was a significant theme of discussion in photography workshops but remained something that was individual to photographers and how they operated in the field. Generally, for photojournalistic and documentary work, the use of written consent forms was seen as a hindrance and only used for commercial shoots. Direct requests for permission was seen as necessary protocol to satisfy clients but in personal practice

requests for access were subtly negotiated in less formal ways between the subjects and the photographer.

In a photography workshop, students were advised that permission was central to their code of conduct but they were simultaneously warned of the changes in interaction and behaviour of the subjects if the request was made formally (Chobi Mela, 2011). Alternative and more subtle ways of ensuring permission were suggested and, in the case studies, access was negotiated by different means dependent on the situation which unfolded. If people saw the photographer as non-threatening, fun or amusing, they generally opened up and consented. From observations in the field, the most fluid interaction occurred when the photographer piqued the curiosity of the people they intended to photograph. In practice there was the constant balance of attracting and rejecting attention to create the tension and keep the interest alive. Bourdieu spoke about these contradicting tensions when photographing in a way that resembled my observations in the case studies, 'there was this objectification and loving, detached and yet intimate relationship to the object, something similar to humour' (quoted in Shulteis and Frisinghelli 2012, p.17). In my observations, some photographers engaged their subjects through humour, some through shock tactics to draw people out of their comfort zones, others with blunt questions or foolish antics to relax people to prove their non-threatening character. Others have different methods of ensuring and maximising opportunities in public situations. (Greer's strategy which worked best for him was, *'I hang around as long as no one gets to irritated and see what I get'.*)

Making this connection was the marker that permission had been gained. There were situations in which photographers asked directly and others where they only showed their camera, implying their intentions. In other cases, they used the technique of taking the first shot as the permission shot. If the subject did not show disapproval, then this implied permission was granted to continue. The idea of showing respect was therefore not only an ethical premise, but was central to gaining access and permission.

"Yes, it's about respect and it's important to respect privacy of the people. I mean you can try hard, or you can try just to confuse them, to allow you to get into their world."
(Diego)

The issues of consent become more complex however when discussing obtaining permission ethically when dealing with children, people with disabilities and those under extreme distress. In these situations, more complex assessments are needed about whether potential subjects are willing to participate or if they feel coerced, uncomfortable or decide to change their mind during the process. Shehab Uddin, whose project documented the lives of street dwellers, spoke of his concern and the precarious position he faced when attempting to gain permission from his subjects:

"These people [street dwellers] did not even look towards the next moment; their existence is a struggle for each moment. And when I spoke to them, they could not understand why someone like I wanted to photograph them. First, they rejected my requests and the next moment they came to ask if I could. It is tough to predict their actions and preferences." (Shehab)

Identity Protection

Additional measures to protect identities when filming vulnerable groups susceptible to social stigmatisation were also put in place. For development NGOs working on topics such as sex work, sexual abuse and matters related to HIV/AIDS, the issue of anonymity becomes a primary concern, as the documentation presented in Chapter 4 identified. The positions on this subject took various forms, from the banning of all imagery of sexually exploited children by ECPAT, the organisation specifically focusing on child sexual exploitation, to the position of other organisations who viewed images as sometimes necessary for raising awareness of the issues.

Photographers on these types of assignments were hesitant about the issues of identity protection. One photographer who identified himself as a social documentarian gave the example of when he was positioned in a conflict between the commissioner and the subjects he was photographing. The assignment was to document sex workers but to change their names. He explained his frustration with the conflict between the requirement to photograph people and the claims made by the commissioner that using pseudonyms in the captions was sufficient to protect people's identities. He saw this as interfering with the wishes of the subjects he worked with and was also illogical if protecting identities was a priority.

"But you can't protect. You are showing the images so what is the point of omitting her name. I think it is much better to put her name...The commissioner said to use the photos of sex workers but to change their names. In my opinion, in that case you

should not disclose their faces either. When I asked the subject for her wishes, she replied yes, please use my name, I am HIV positive. I am just happy I don't have diabetes." (Chandran)

In another assignment on the issue of trafficking and sex work Ahmed raised similar concerns over the visual masking of identities.

"The rationale that NGOs give for not using visible shots of faces is that the people are recognisable. During this assignment I went to the homes of these girls who were income earners for their families. The income was able to put younger siblings in school and provide necessary funds for the family. It was obvious to the community how this money was entering the family, so I ask what the real purpose of this protection is." (Ahmed)

These photographers further argued that if images of the subjects were recognised but portrayed with secrecy or given assumed names, this may in fact cause further stigmatisation. In other cases, the subjects themselves asked for their names and identities to be revealed and when these requests were turned down in the name of organisational protection protocol, it could be seen as overriding these wishes, thereby undermining the dignity of the subjects and the respect for the agency of the people portrayed to have an active input in how they are represented. These types of judgements implicitly deem the subject as not having the full capacity to make decisions about how they are represented. This is in fact in opposition to the messages of empowerment and respect for the agency of the beneficiaries that many of the organisational branding policies purport to be promoting.

7.5 Chapter Conclusion

The previous two chapters explored the minutiae of photographic shoots. This chapter has identified the implications suggested by this data and the linkages between larger conceptual themes and the reality on the ground on assignment. This chapter has covered the wider tensions in the photographic industry on humanitarian subject matter and the dilemmas that photographers face in the field, including the demands of commissioners, tight schedules, and lack of cooperation from subjects. Informants from the photographic community, particularly the Bangladeshi photographers who took on NGO assignments, are reflexive about their role in representing their country and their active role in contributing those images to the economy of humanitarianism. They are also aware

that their work, increasingly valued in international and NGO circles, attracts criticism from domestic audiences for maintaining the exploitative status quo: of selling poverty to promote careers. Although photographers claim to be seeking alternative representations and narratives, by drawing on their local knowledge, NGO commissions reinforce a reliance on limited narratives which do not allow for significant deviation. The demands and visual codes demanded by the NGOs in the observed assignments did not offer alternatives to the conventional narratives and stereotypes and in general local photographers do not have any more room to express diverse opinions as the 'insider' due to the strict image demands and ethical protocols placed on these assignments.

Despite this however, many photographers remained guided by the three conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity which were interpreted in differing ways at the level of image-making. Authenticity coincided with the professional understanding of their role as bearing-witness. Solidarity was understood as building trust and respecting subjects in photographic interaction that was essential when approaching people to gain access and cooperation. Issues of dignity become a source of tension between the social actors when perspectives on how to protect and respect the privacy and identity of vulnerable subjects ethically collide. The processes and practices of photographers in the field are more nuanced and conflicted than the theories which position the photographer and subject in binary positions, one with power and the other lacking it. The implications of these assumptions are discussed further in the concluding Chapter 8.

Chapter 8

Discussion: Can the claim of ethical humanitarian photography be justified?

8.1 Introduction

Identifying the tensions in the processes of production has drawn attention to some of the key sensitivities in the humanitarian field, the differing definitions of photographic ethics, and the resultant decisions reached by the social actors involved in photographic production. The research has identified a division between aspirational ethics on one hand and the constraints and needs that inform the processes and practices of production on the other, in addition to the conflicts among the principles aspired to. Because of this divide, and the sensitivity encountered on the topic, identifying tensions in the process has been a considered and productive method in revealing how ethics are understood by the key actors involved in the production of humanitarian images and to detail the issues which remain unresolved. The four ethnographic case studies have been central to the identification of these latent tensions and provide the basis for tentative general conclusions about understandings of ethical practices and principles in the production of humanitarian photography.

This thesis identifies multiple tensions in the production of photographs. Beginning with the theoretical writings on the subject, this thesis argues that photography and its practices have thrown up several philosophical and ideological dilemmas, which revolve primarily around questions of representation and truth. Certain critical streams of work rejected the idea that photographic recording can be neutral and impartial and have supported the claim that photographic practice is always embedded in relationships of power and control (Tagg, 1993; Sontag, 1979; Foucault, 1977; Baudrillard, 1995; for full discussion see Chapter 2). Photography therefore becomes closely tied to tensions in the international politico-economic sphere, between countries who give aid and those who receive it, and in the beneficiary communities between the members who receive programme

support and those who do not. Furthermore there are considerable tensions between NGOs and the media; between the social actors, particularly between photographers and commissioning agents (see Chapter 4); and, in the field, between the photographer and their subjects over how they wish to be represented (see Chapters 5 and 6). Other tensions became apparent in the critiques of photographers who choose humanitarian subject matter as their professional orientation and which are exacerbated by the competition between photographers for these assignments (Chapter 7). Finally, tensions have become evident at a personal level in the navigation between the dual roles of researcher and photographer (Chapter 8).

This concluding chapter is presented in two sections. Section 8.2 reviews the research findings, first by reviewing the process of production and its ethical components, and then presents the tensions as revealed in process and practice. Section 8.3 presents a personal reflection on interpersonal decision-making in the process of filming.

8.2 Observations of Tensions in Practice and Process

Social rights and humanistic principles lie at the heart of the social documentary tradition, and the ethical concerns of the practice are not new issues to the field. Regulatory practices however have been transformed in the last twenty years into formalised and codified processes aiming to assist the production of morally guided work. The climate within which humanitarian photography operates is one where good intentions no longer satisfy the demands of stakeholders (such as audiences or commissioners) and there are potentially severe consequences for organisations if the rights-based values are not seen to be upheld. The commercialisation of NGOs and the importance of organisational branding which complies with regulations, have constructed a seemingly comprehensive framework addressing the areas of practice to be regulated. These frameworks have not been universally welcomed, however, and some photographers have felt that the codes and practices in the humanitarian sector have limited their repertoires and homogenised the image landscape. *"Their [commissioners'] demands are always the same. They all want positive stories, but everything cannot be positive."* (Ahmed)

Standardised images and conventional narratives remain in the confines of the positive-negative judgement criteria, where the positive (or active subject) is viewed as ethical while the negative (or

passive subject) is generally assessed as unprincipled, thereby exposing organisations who use negative imagery to critique. This polemical categorisation is central to the discourse of practitioners and critics of messaging, yet it fails to capture the mixed messages that communications promote. This type of assessment framework only considers the final image in its judgement and as this research has shown this is insufficient as more complex considerations must be made which lie beyond the content of the image.

This association of positive/negative with ethical/unethical is unrealistic in practice. It is evident that no commissioner or photographer would set out to produce 'unethical' photography but it remains a common tendency to incorporate negative imagery in NGO reports and visibility projects. The use of these types of images is justified and rationalised by reference to the higher humanitarian aims of the organisation. As this research has revealed, the rationales evoked may be that the photographer was bearing witness to the situation, that the public have a right to know the actual situation on the ground, or that even though the depiction of the subject is less than dignified, its use has positive consequences of raising money to assist countless people who are in similar circumstances.

As NGOs have tried to become more accountable to their donors, there has been an expansion of progress reporting communications, such as documentary assignments, which provide proof of programme success. There has also been an increased emphasis on transparency, increasing the range of information provided to the public and making branding strategies public. This increased transparency allows for the display of organisational adherence to humanistic principles and seems to imply that ethical photography is possible as long as images are respectfully sourced and contain balanced representations as set out in the photography guidelines of the organisation. It also suggests that producing ethical photographs is a relatively linear process that involves selecting subjects, certifying their consent and ensuring they are portrayed as empowered and that this direct challenge to the stereotype of the passive victim ensures ethical compliance. Production is thus reduced to a straightforward process with ready-made solutions to any ethical problems.

The two categories of social actors in the production, the photographers making the images in the field, and the development organisations that commission them, both operate within limitations and constraints as they pursue elusive, ethical and engaged photographs for their assignments and for

their campaigns. One of the areas of conflict is who determines how ethics are assessed and what forms of practice are to be adopted. Without closer scrutiny, it might be assumed that this is a conflict between those who commission and distribute images and those who take them. However this research has shown that disagreements and lack of consensus exist even within professional groups, as well as between individuals, and at the inter- and intra-organisational levels (Chapter 4). The setting and evaluating of ethical standards involves a process of substitution and trade-offs between the elements, depending on the social actors involved, the organisations who commission and the particular circumstances on the ground. As they are largely the result of subjective judgements, contradictory views are invariably produced. This research argues that this is a more complex process than a linear production model assumes and that there remain three interconnected areas of ethical concern; the image content, the sourcing of photographs and the attachment of text.

The image content has been the traditional focus of academic criticism, with research revolving around the politics of representation and mediatory effects on Western understandings of the poor in the global South. In this research, the image content was largely dictated in the assignment briefs where the project description and preferences for content were clearly set out. The second area of ethical concern is the sourcing of the photographs. This was supposedly mitigated through regulation, informed consent and identity protection measures but as my research has shown, these good intentions do not translate directly into practice and furthermore strict observance of these codes may even result in practices contradictory to ethical principles (This is discussed in section 8.2.5.) The third and least discussed area of ethical concern involves the regulation of text and taglines which have become more overt in communications strategies as a way of attracting attention and leading the viewer into the visual regimes and emotions of suffering which are not depicted in the image content.

Given their importance in the transmission of meaning, this omission is problematic and seems to give a free hand to communications teams to alter the intended meanings of photographs to suit project needs in a way without directly contradicting or infringing the regulations. Even if image content and filming are deemed ethical, the associated text can manipulate and misinform. While photographers have some power over determining content, the nature of the industry means that they largely lose control of the images and the contexts in which they will appear once they are

submitted. This limitation seems to be a de-facto accepted part of the practice. However, considering the significance of text in constructing meaning, the claims being attached to these photographs through captioning and text have not been given close enough scrutiny. Even if images comply with regulation as containing 'ethical' visual content, and can be shown to have been sourced 'ethically', the strap lines attached can make the photograph detract from the subject's dignity and undermine its basis in, and claims to, authenticity. This thesis argues that while ethical regulation has homogenised and sanitised humanitarian imagery, it has been left to the text as the main means to supply the intended 'shock' effects.

8.2.1 Regulatory Tensions

Regulation does not operate as a strictly enforced code or as a standard prescriptive solution to the vagaries of practice and process, but acts in conjunction with other more innocuous constraints enforced by the numerous stakeholders. The stakeholder bodies contributing to the pressure are the media, academics, politicians and audiences in the funding and receiving countries as well as other organisations in competition for the same visibility. Critiques also come from the self-reflexive position of the organisation and their questioning of their responsibility as institutions of representation.

From a more theoretical position, a few questions arise. One of them is whether participation in communications photography produces harmful consequences to its photographic subjects, and if so, what level of risk is involved and what is the likelihood of occurrence. Potential harm to the subjects is defined as involving further victimisation and stigmatisation within the communities of the people who participate. Nevertheless, in many cases, the dangers of participation in filming are minimal compared to the dangers and hardships encountered in everyday life and may in some cases provide benefits. The arrival of a filming crew can provide an opportunity for improvement and on several of the assignments I witnessed, participation did have direct benefits for some.

One of the claimed purposes of ethical regulation is the protection of the photographic subjects, but the emphasis is often misplaced – there is a great deal of importance placed on identity protection and an over-exaggerated preoccupation with photographic consent. Yet identities can never be fully

protected and if there is risk to the people involved, further questions must be raised as to why subjects are ever placed in this potentially vulnerable situation in the first place.

Assuring protection through regulation is problematic because it assumes the incapacity of the photographic subjects to evaluate risks independently. This in part reflects the heritage of understanding photographic practice as a tool of expropriation and exploitation and which does not account for the ability of its subjects to reject, decline and defend themselves.

"People are aware of the camera and have agency to say no – they are not afraid to tell you so. The very fact that this is questioned seems absurd." (Greer)

The research case studies highlighted how subjects were complicit with the ways that they were represented and how they were able to negotiate this (this may not apply in extreme cases of distress, but was not an issue in these case studies). The subjects were not simply objects in front of the lens and interactions unfolded in more complex terms than theory assumes.

The regulatory assurances and claims of protecting photographic subjects can be seen as a smoke-screen for the anxieties of filming the suffering and the vulnerable. One of the conclusions that this thesis draws is that regulation, although premised on good intentions, is more effective in serving public relations functions that maintain organisational identities, than in upholding claims to protect and prevent abuse of beneficiaries in the representational arena. Practice in the field showed the highly complex processes and multiplicity of ethical considerations based on subjective judgements made by its actors which could not be predicted or reflected in regulatory codes.

8.2.2 Representational Tensions

A commonly cited tension expressed by photographers and NGOs is the question of how best to contribute politically to the efforts to alter the representations of people in the global South. Both categories of producers shared concerns over the questions of representation and the social responsibilities of their role as institutions/makers of representation, although they acknowledged some tensions between fulfilling this role while being effective communicators. The NGOs attempted to deal with this through formal codes of conduct, guidelines and ethical regulations about the sourcing and types of imagery used. They were well aware of the academic and internal critiques of their work in the last twenty years, even the Bangladeshi photographers were

influenced by these arguments but worked under other constraints. They were fully aware of NGOs' need for particular types of images for successful appeals for support and knew that they had to satisfy client demands in order to secure future assignments. At the same time they remained concerned about how their images contributed to the stereotypical representations of their country. Academic analysis, critique and discourse have filtered down to the level of practitioners who showed awareness of the literature on issues of empowerment, positive/negative imagery and the politics of representation. With the inclusion of sociological insights into practice, the research shows that new, democratising, localised forms of imaging are arising and becoming forms of practice which encourage the expansion of understanding from the critical theories of photography. How these fit into the conventionalised and bureaucratic system of communications in NGO organisations however may not be straightforward.

8.2.3 Interpersonal Tensions

There are also more micro-level, interpersonal tensions arising from the photography of vulnerable populations, many of which are often left unspoken. Validating and bearing witness to the plight and circumstances of Others is often used as a way of justifying certain forms of photographic practice. Most of the photographers who participated in this study stated that their overriding ethical consideration, and the only decision effectively under their control, was distilled in the reflexive question: how do I choose to represent the subject, as a victim or as a witness? However, the paradox of this process lies in the fact that empowerment and social change are key motivators for photographers who see themselves as working in this tradition but the practices of bearing witness create a silent contract between the photographer and the subjects, which can be seen to fall short of this aim. The term 'photographic broken promise' (Chanarin and Broomberg, 2009) draws on the notion that the photographic interaction entails an implicit understanding that the picture will somehow bring benefits to the subject which the photographers do not have the power to give or guarantee. This promise may well develop into guilt in the reflexive moments of the critical photographer.

The notion of the photographic broken promise is premised on the understanding that the subject endows the photographer with this power. In my observations of these assignments, and in contrast to this notion, the subjects who gave access were not only extremely savvy in front of the camera -

they knew its *potential* power - and agreed to participate not because they were certain the photographer had the power to influence social change, but because it was seen as the best option in limited circumstances. Exchanging their time for participation was seen as something they had power over, either as a principle of exchange for the programmes they had already benefitted from or in the hope of persuading them to continue. The power differential between the photographer and the community, while evident, is not as absolute and unidirectional at the interpersonal level as some theoretical approaches suppose.

8.2.4 Conceptual Tensions

The three conceptual criteria of authenticity, solidarity and dignity guide the decision-making of producers. The research shows a general cohesion and agreement of the principles which should guide production, however observations at the level of practice reveal a more complex situation in which processes most often transpire as trade-offs which are highly dependent on the situations in the field. The conceptual criteria are occasionally at odds and often irreconcilable at the level of practice.

The overriding emphasis on positive imagery by organisations clashes with the conceptual criteria of authenticity. The potential for conflict arises if either the photographer assesses the situation as too negative to photograph or if the situation on the ground does not support the commissioners' assignment demands. An example here is the case with Akimunesa who wanted the story of her paralysed husband told (Chapter 6). The assignment brief emphasised positive and encouraging photographs evidencing programme success and images of Akimunesa's husband were contrary to these demands and did not meet the criteria for upholding dignity. The photographer however felt that the need for an authentic depiction of the situation overrode the case for dignity and that to take the picture was in fact the most ethical decision considering the circumstances. His actions were a reflection of his self-imposed responsibility toward Akimunesa and her family, as a result of the relationship that had developed over the day of filming, and his duty to document accurately. This case exemplifies the way conceptual criteria can clash when witnessing the more dire predicaments of the human condition, and that the decision to take or *not* to take a photograph can be experienced by the photographer as a confrontation to personal principles of ethical conduct.

One approach to the dilemma of how to achieve a compromise between the criteria of dignity and authenticity is to depict negative situations with a positive subject. This was recounted by Akil in Chapter 7 during the flooding where he chose to highlight the strength of the family rebuilding their house rather than the effects of disease during the disaster. Another way of achieving a compromise is through the use of the expanded formats of reporting, including multiple images series, narrating beneficiary experiences, which have become trends in documentation. Within lengthier narrative formats images depicting need and suffering can be juxtaposed with images of resiliency suggesting both the resiliency of the people and the success of the solutions provided by the organisation.

Another way of managing and encouraging positive imagery, and eliminating the dilemma of how to depict despair, is by arranging and stage managing events to ensure that people are involved in activities which denote resiliency and agency. One such example was the NGO arranging for our arrival to coincide with the cattle fair in Case Study Four. This provided evidence of programme success, with beneficiaries engaged in activity and evidencing empowerment. The filming during this event raised fewer ethical dilemmas although the staging and managing of a scene suggests a certain level of inauthenticity. It is in independent and in-depth documentary projects, which need greater access to people's lives, and a greater commitment of their time, where the ethical considerations and tensions between authenticity and dignity become more acute.

8.2.5 Tensions between Consent Protocol and Practice

One of the key elements of the ethics guidelines was the insistence on the use of consent forms⁶⁴ which was presented in all the interviews with NGO communications management as evidence of ethically sourced content and respect for subject rights. During my field research however I did not witness them in use and photographers suggested that they did not work in practice for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, the use of consent forms supports the ideology of subjects as not possessing agency. Secondly, at the time of requesting consent, the consent form assumes the final uses of the images are known. Thirdly, during the fieldwork it became apparent that consent forms, just as any other

⁶⁴ Also referred to as subject release forms or model release forms.

documentation which appears as contractual, are met with resistance from local populations. Finally, asking for permission in such a manner has the potential to alter the interaction between photographer and subject. These are discussed below.

There are a variety of problems inherent in the consent form, not least that it assumes that the people who sign them are powerless and incapable of negotiating their position, making them in need of protection. It also infers that the 'poor' populations are unaware of the power of the photograph, which was not always the case, as my research has shown. The assumption premising these types of ethical legislation is that they are formulated for the protection of the photographic subjects and that the ones who create and issue them have the power to ensure their protection. The subjects are also not involved in the process of creating the ethical frameworks and consent forms, which beg the question of what claims are being made about ethics when key stakeholders are not consulted about these guidelines.

The consent contract also contains certain assumptions about the uses of the images and the projects for which they will be used. While images are taken for particular projects, they are inserted into global NGO image libraries which allow for their global movement and unlimited access from the database by staff members, and as such the future use of images cannot be guaranteed. A further problem with consent forms arises over the literacy skills of the subjects which means that, in many cases, there is an understandable hesitance to sign any form of contract. Ethical questions arise over the need for signed forms if people signing them are not able to interpret first-hand what the forms entail. In Bangladesh, written consent forms had to be dropped on photographic assignments with Reading Room and replaced by verbal requests and an announcement about the purposes and intentions of filming. This decision was made by the Country Director in light of the fact that many of the photographic subjects were illiterate and the area had a history of land disputes and child trafficking. In these circumstances the signing of anything viewed as contractual was ethically problematic and likely to cause undue stress and refusal to participate.

From the perspective of the photographers, the issue of permission is a central component of the practice, an inherent part of building 'connection' to subjects and photographers find their own ways of negotiating methods appropriate to the situation and people involved. Consent forms can

unnecessarily alter encounters which are intended to be spontaneous and unstructured into formal exchanges (similar issues encountered in ethnographic studies, see Haggerty 2004, p.404). In reality, consent did not happen by signing a form but was negotiated in the form of an informal request, a raised eyebrow, or the use of a first shot as the 'permission shot' to assess if the subject is willing to participate and grant permission for further shots. The position in practice is that photographs are a reflection of the interaction between the photographer and the subject in the lens, as argued by the renowned documentary photographer, Sebastian Salgado.

"The picture is not made by the photographer, the picture is more good or less good in function of the relationship that you have with the people you photograph." (Salgado quoted in Ritchin, 1990)

Photographic consent then becomes an interpersonal negotiation and not a legal contract. The photographers who participated in this research told of the increasing adoption of consent procedures and protection protocols when they were working on NGO assignments, and even local NGOs viewed it as a necessary measure to encourage funding from the West. As the ones explaining their purposes on the ground to the subjects participating with them, the photographers generally felt the protocol was in place to protect and serve the interests of the organisation more than the people being photographed. It placed the photographers in a potentially difficult situation of delivering assurances of where the images would go, while they lacked control of their future use and could give no such guarantees. Undeniably there is the potential for abuse in the practices of image-making, however regulating these risks, just as with any other human activity, is problematic.

8.3 Insights and Oversights on Personal Practice

The journey of investigation into the production of the ethical humanitarian image has been intertwined with my personal journey to become a photographer (of sorts). The two paths have at times merged and, at others, have diverged and caused tensions. In this thesis the two voices reflecting the roles of researcher and photographer feature to highlight simultaneously the disjoint between theory and practice, the gap between the aspirational ethics one claims to have and the sudden arbitrary decisions one makes in the field and the realisation that the good intentions one

has in principle do not necessarily translate in practice. This section presents the most relevant insights from personal investigation, informing the key questioning of ethics in photography.

My filming began in the streets of Kolkata and Dhaka in 2008 and I felt (and probably behaved) like 'bundles of shocked sensibility' as Van de Ven (2011, p.149) described the foreign tourist's initial descent on the Kolkatan street scene. I was fully engrossed with my Nikon D80, adjusting and readjusting settings, often oblivious to the observers who inevitably came to watch. My images started with buildings and objects, until, with trepidation, I began to take pictures of people. I was heavily influenced by the critique on the objectifying nature of the camera and the perturbing fact that I, as a Western researcher, was taking pictures of the 'poor' people of the South as an academic exercise. Placed in this position of the all-powerful photographer (in theory) I was burdened by an ethical compulsion that I could not clearly define in theory or practice. On the other hand, I was keen to learn how to make better photographs, so I strived to follow the classic advice from Robert Capa who said "If your photos aren't good enough, then you're not close enough" (Capa quoted in Magnum, 2012), which seemed to encourage a sort of blatant appropriation of the subjects. I wanted to capture snapshots of people's lives without being intrusive on their activities, and found myself in a paradoxical situation, when it was I who initially felt intruded upon as the streets were places of close encounters and I was showered with attention and displays of curiosity.

I also realised however that holding a camera allowed a certain freedom with which I was able to transcend my inherent shyness and explore my endless curiosity of people. It gave me permission to interact with strangers because it provided an excuse to be present in the situation (I am taking a picture) and when looking through the viewfinder I engaged first with an image and then with the real person.

In time I became a flâneuse⁶⁵ of the South Asian metropolis. I became fascinated by the mesmerising pace of activity, the sensory overload and the masses of people performing activities and going to places I could only wonder about. I hesitantly started taking images of people and the thrill of the potential scenes and interactions which could unfold at any time never disappeared during the journey. Image making became an adventure, following the flows and ebbs of situations

⁶⁵ The flâneur, theorised by Benjamin, refers to a person who gains pleasure from wandering the city streets and is simultaneously in the world and is detached from the city and the activities in it.

unfolding and random meetings, and slowly I began to comprehend the highly developed organisation of the neighbourhoods I visited, which, contrary to my Western notions of public and private space, Chatterjee (2011, pers. comm., 18 August) accurately described as networks of public and private moments in shared spaces. Therefore the camera evolved into a useful tool of research, not only for the images it produced but for the interactions and permission it gave me to explore the more ephemeral experiences and spaces of 'people'.

When my comfort with the camera increased, I approached what I was doing from a more analytical perspective and started questioning what I wanted to 'say' and what messages I could communicate through my images and whether these differed if approached from a personal or academic perspective. My academic self was preoccupied with accuracy, aesthetics and signifiers; however my personal approach was navigation through feeling and the surrounding atmosphere to relate in images. Additionally, I was preoccupied with the question of whether the photographic interaction could be in any way empowering for the subjects, in contrast to the sociological work I had read which emphasised the significance of final images. I recalled the approach to images taken by Bourdieu. In an interview he had stated photography for him was not only an instrument of social research, but also a mode of showing people 'I'm interested in you, I'm on your side, I'll listen to you, I'll testify to what you are going through' (quoted in Schultheis and Frisinghelli, 2012, p.17). His perspective was informed by a self-ascribed responsibility to testify the plight of Others, and the belief that your subjects saw you in this light.

Yet while I found this idea thrilling in theory, it also raised more troubling questions. If photographers such as myself, feel they have the power to offer testimony, validation, recognition, then I question what role are we placing the subjects in – and how are their pictures being made? As ones who need to be validated? Or ones who photographers (and researchers) need to validate photographic exhibitions and/or research? Was I using the power of the camera to bear witness or validate myself? These questions problematised my role even further and amplified the tensions around the power which photographers and researchers alike assume and the potential for change the photographs and research documents claim they can achieve. Assumptions about the role of the photographer and the impact of their work may often be over-exaggerated, I found.

The process of being a student of photography and of being on assignment revealed elements of interactions and relationships which are not always reflected upon. Photographic encounters had the capacity to become personal relationships – even very fleeting ones – with some subjects offering more than you could offer in return by divulging personal stories, providing hospitality and welcoming participation in activities. My instinct to respect space was one which, for me, transcended the assignment needs and deadlines. It is a role in which “*You are never just a photographer*”(Bitan), even though you are caught up in the moments viewed from behind the lens and defined as something beyond the activity you are engaged in.

The interactions also present moments which one does not understand and I relate very much to what Van de Ven writes of her experience of street photography:

‘And yet the photograph that was not made has its own story to tell: every city, including one’s own, throws up moments and encounters that are illegible. This is disconcerting, but it is part of being a tourist, and of being human.’ (2011, p.148)

It is the photograph that reveals these encounters in the frame, and it is a practice which facilitates them and can be a rich experience for both photographers and their subjects. That reflects the main underlying fascination with the medium, its demands to explore and to look in a way one normally would not.

The four case studies conducted in this research occurred as fast-paced adventures with tight schedules, and over long distances which took me to locations I had not been to before. There was great satisfaction, not only with my success in gaining access to my research data, which was clouded with layers of sensitivities, but also the excitement at the images produced. The element of accident is part of the language of photography. The images always contained surprises which were disclosed after returning from assignment, in the form of technical accidents which had, in fact, produced interesting images. It was also in the review of images that I was able to see how the camera had caught situations unfolding in the background which I had been oblivious to during filming.

In the Reading Room assignment for which I was commissioned, the requirements were defined and non-negotiable. The location, people and theme were clearly set to match the content of the communications brief and with the limited time and harsh lighting conditions, the success in

fulfilling these aims became a negotiation through different levels of authenticity. The one image which made publication in the annual report was the staged photograph of Fuara reading for her grandfather. (Chapter 5, Photograph 21). The fact that I staged, or guided, (or "*staged but not staged*" as Ahmed had the tendency of saying) the scene in order to get a photograph came at a time when my main concern was the time constraints and concern about whether I would complete the assignment. I therefore guided Fuara into position and was lucky she was willing to cooperate.

My decision to guide was largely informed by my commitment and obligation to the commissioner and it was a matter of luck that the images which the commissioner wanted did not undermine the ways in which Fuara wanted to be represented. This saved me from any greater moral conundrum. However in assignments when the demands of the two groups differ I can imagine it posing a highly sensitive question: who do you as the photographer ultimately serve and what lengths do you go to meet those demands?

I remain uncertain about whether I consider myself to have produced 'ethical' photography as a 'humanitarian' photographer. During the course of these assignments I did not see the ethical guidelines or protocol before assignments, nor did I follow the formalised consent procedures. What I do acknowledge is that I attempted to show a respect for the subjects, in part to uphold my own standards of etiquette and ethics and, in part, because I wanted them to trust me and cooperate with me for the images to succeed. Errors of judgement undoubtedly occurred, as described in Case Study Three with the crying girl, but attaching the label of unethical or ethical would seem imprecise and unhelpful in reflecting on assignments because each of them involved different situations which required different approaches.

It was during the post-assignment reading of my field notes that I started thinking about the people, situations and my performances with more emotion, which I had not been able to do in the field. I was engrossed in the job of observing and recording and felt largely detached from many of the situations as they were performed around me. As time passed, their stories and faces came back to me and some I think of with great fondness. In other cases, I have regrets that I could have done something to alleviate their struggles but did not. I could have given money for medical care or some other form of assistance. I could have bought some food for the family so 'the girl in the red dress' (see Chapter 6) could eat as much rice as she wanted. All of these things I did not do and

question why I did not. Was it because I had got caught up in the theoretical perspectives of aid dependency? Or not wanting to disturb the community balance as a researcher / foreigner / photographer? Did I allow that intellectualism to override my humanity and opportunity for action? Regrets are something most photographers who encounter human suffering face as are questions over how much to intervene or if to intervene at all. They come in many forms and psychological scars have long been documented in the field of journalism (see Lyon, 2006). Stanley Greene who covered the war in Chechnya explains his regrets and psychological effects of his profession:

"I cannot list all the times someone protected me, took me in to share their last bit of food, gave me a place to sleep, saved my life. Over the years, the Chechen war also became my story...It is almost impossible not to play the role of the provocateur and difficult to imagine why others are not as angry as I am, while they in turn feel shut out from a world they have not experienced — and cannot imagine." (Greene, 2004)

Regrets also come in less severe form, from not asking the name of a blind boy who insisted on having his picture taken (Alam 2007, p. 48), or in my case for not making the acquaintance of a persistent girl in a blue dress who had followed me for two days but whose constant presence I only noticed after I reviewed my images.

In my assignments there was only one case when I witnessed people who were in great despair, isolation and extreme human physical suffering. This was the case of Akimunesa's husband (in Chapter 6) and the encounter moved me in my helplessness as much as it affected the photographer. Photographically, my dilemma was whether to take the picture or not. Even though I was encouraged by his wife to do so, my question to myself was why and what good can be done by it? Knowing the image could not be used or sold, I hesitated over whether to take it. If I had in fact decided differently and taken the picture, an obligation to do something with it would have set in. In this case the photographer took that stand and felt it was his duty to document and report back to the NGO of the circumstances of the family but I was not so sure.

8.4 Research Conclusions

The academic work on representations bases its arguments on a binary system divided into, of us (as adult, Western, Fortunate) and them (as child, from the global South, Unfortunate), which suggest the level of practice and interpersonal interaction are just as compact and pre-determined as

these categorisations. The central binary distinction became more complex as fieldwork progressed and in relation to unfolding events and the theoretical understanding of labels and boundaries of the West and global South, the Fortunate viewer and the needy beneficiary, the photographer and the victim started to blur. These assigned categories became too limiting and general. The processes and practices of production showed much wider diversity, of motivations, of political aims, vested interests and skills of survival. The events observed were not as simplistic. The contestation and the production included the people who critics claim are being objectified. The interactions which ensued became a matter of serendipity, unpredictability and haphazard affairs that could not be explained only by power and politics in representational practices.

Photography is a complex and intuitive process and operationalising ethical regulations to ensure ethical content and ethical methods in sourcing images is highly problematic. The practices in image making, and the perspectives of the photographers, show the complex sets of decisions and negotiations that take place which regulation cannot account for. Standardising practices in photography involving human interaction, which incorporate elements of instinct, human error and the spontaneous actions inherent in making images, is not only impractical but impossible, and regulatory attempts at doing so may work to conceal the very practices that can make the practice potentially exploitative.

The idea that humanitarian-based charities are involved in a struggle over 'truth' production (Lidchi, 1993) was expanded in this study to include an in-depth micro-level analysis of the perspectives of the social actors involved in the process. The photographers, commissioners and photographic subjects are all complicit with this truth production and the struggle for meaning, not only with the meanings promoted in the visual communications but also in defining and attaching meaning to ethics and ethical conduct in sourcing these images.

The photographic assignments and perspectives of the producers uncovered that these situations of filming can be unpredictable affairs, which make evaluations of ethics a complex and situation-specific process covering numerous considerations that develop on-site. The photographer negotiates for participation in the configuration of events and negotiation becomes a balance between the varying needs: the personal, the client, the community and the individual in front of the camera. The findings suggest that humanitarian imagery and its production is not a conspiracy

or a pre-calculated scheme to manipulate audiences into falsities for political gain or to degrade photographic subjects intentionally. The considerations and perspectives of the producers are framed within wider social and more immediate professional pressures which is characterised by unpredictability and disorganised evolution of events in the field.

The research has identified a porous code of photographic ethics in humanitarian imaging which is organisation-specific and, in practice, highly situational and open to interpretation. The findings from the secondary data and ethnographic cases show that the production of humanitarian imagery is strewn with ethical considerations which make the notion of an ethical photograph unhelpful as a singular prescriptive concept. The issue of ethics is much wider than accounted for in regulation, in part because there is insufficient common understanding of what ethics means in practice.

The reason for this lack of cohesion is that the process of production involves a human element in image-making which some photographic studies have lost sight of, essentialising images to their political capacities (Pinney, 2003). Some of the organisational codes on photography envisage the process as one where codes are applicable to all filming contexts and are based on the idea that the photographer is in charge of the environment in which he or she operates. This approach does not take into consideration how the relationship between the photographer and his subjects develop *in situ* and how this might potentially alter ethical considerations and ways of decision-making. Even if practice is guided by regulation of photographic ethicism, it is the human capacity which constructs the interactions of filming.

Part of the reason such circular arguments continue may be the emphasis in theory and social understanding on the truth and veracity of the photograph – largely a modernist concern. The shifts in the cultural sphere of rising Asian economies, as was evidenced by this research among the Bangladeshi photographer community who actively question and struggle to distinguish themselves in the international image economy, points to the shift to a market logic of deepening capitalism. The politics of cultural production that accompanies the neoliberalisation of cultural spheres has shifted the representational concerns of the West versus the Rest, of truth and falsity, into more dynamic and complex networks that require consideration and inclusion into theoretical concerns.

This research suggests that neither ethical guidelines nor good intentions can support claims of ethical imagery since they do not account for the complexity and variety of decisions that occur in the process. All actors in the process of production were working under constraints and decisions which were made with an awareness of the other interests. How identities were maintained and promoted, personal responsibilities for the types representations being circulated and their assumed political effects, the need to build trust and credibility with consumers and abiding as closely as possible to the regulatory requirements, were all consideration affecting actions. In light of the multiple and sometimes contradictory interest of those involved in production practices, the main incentive for ethical regulation and image guidelines has been presented as a mechanism for the protection of photographic subjects from harm: the protection of their identities, their consent in the process and with the representational aims of distributing more 'balanced' imagery of the global South in the international image economy. However, this ethical enthusiasm has influenced the photographic industry and promoted certain forms of representational tropes in which the beneficiaries are imaged. It has simplified the visual messages and in doing so retained the positive/negative divide of imagery. It can also be argued that the more formal and sanitised the images, the less information they relate, becoming merely symbolic markers of the conventional narratives that NGOs feel safe to promote rather than fulfilling any descriptive or political function. These familiar interpretations reinforce simple victimhood and allow the attachment of text and narratives to photographs which support the intentions of the organisations rather than the ones intended by the photographer or the subject in the photograph.

One of the omissions in theory and in the regulatory guidelines is the acknowledgement of the agency of subjects in the field. The fact that the photographic subjects are those considered poor and marginalised, and in many cases in dire circumstances, has fostered a tendency to view all photographic subjects as lacking agency and needing protection. Yet the willingness to participate, the ability to confront and to alter self-representations, as demonstrated in the case studies, cannot be discounted based on the fact of being labelled poor and disadvantaged and it is patronising to do so. In many of the case studies participation in filming was in the hope that some form of assistance or benefit would result, based on self-evaluations of risks of participation. This denial of the agency, in theory and regulation, disempowers the subjects that organisations and photographers

strive to document, and is in conflict with the desired visual messages of resiliency and celebration of empowerment.

Therefore this thesis argues for the incorporation of human agency into analyses of photographs and their uses. This argument does not stand as a consequentialist position asserting that this inclusion would make images communicate something more balanced, or offer a singular resolution to the issue, but I hold the position that understanding the social lives and relationships of the actors outside of the frame may affect how audiences consume these images, thereby affecting the other moments of the circuit of culture.

There are always issues and risks of exploitation and deception in all human interaction when power relations are disproportionate, however increased reliance on regulatory code for ethics poses potential danger for the ways image-making in the humanitarian sphere operates. Making the ethics frameworks prescriptive not only homogenises the image economy, but also undermines individual agency and the personal code of accountability felt by producers, thereby creating a system of inflexible conformity to protocol rather than relying on, or promoting, individual accountability. This position does not argue for value relativism in photography or deny its importance. Rather the opposite and I argue that ethics in the macro and micro levels are central to the practice and that responsibility cannot be relegated to organisational codes enshrined in or guided by branding strategies. Regardless of how comprehensive guidelines may be, the ethical decisions of its producers are highly subjective. Guidelines can always be interpreted to suit various interests, and as such, definitions of 'ethical' and 'unethical' must be understood as contextual and institutionally specific.

In conclusion, the emphasis on the politics of photography, and the concentration on representation and the truth/proof value of images may distract from the actual issues being represented. Social change in the sphere of altering representation is less complex than combating issues of social inequality, structural violence and redistribution of wealth that informs the human condition. The risk of emphasising concerns within the field of representations is that it may potentially become a token condolence for underlying issues which go unaddressed. A disproportionate emphasis on the truth value of images can have the consequence of unintentionally securing them as the main areas of concern, and not the actual inequalities and injustices that images are depicting. This thesis is an

attempt to reinsert the consideration of the social lives that occur outside the frame into photographic thought.

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